

Allward

E·S·STEVENS



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ALLWARD

A STORY OF GYPSY LIFE

By

E. S. STEVENS

Author of "The Veil," "Sarah Eden," etc.

Dnower, Ethel Stefania (Stevens) Lady

"I seized the opportunity of addressing a few words to a Kirghiz woman, asking her if she did not weary of this roving gypsy life of hers. 'We cannot be so indolent,' she replied, 'as you mollahs are, and spend the entire day in one place. Man must move about; the sun, the moon, the stars, the water, animals, birds, fish, all are moving; only the dead lie motionless.'"

VAMBÉRY

"Northward, southward, eastward, westward—allward—"



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NO 2

To
CHARLES AND LIL
Forest-Dwellers

m.v.g. p. 13-15.

I HAVE been concerned about the translation of certain gypsy words which occur in this book. Footnotes are irritating, a vocabulary wastes a reader's time and patience. And yet certain words, as "mush," man or husband; "chavis," children; "yog," fire; "rye," gentleman; and "raunie," lady, are ever on the lips of "travellers." I have, therefore, rarely translated a gypsy word. The meaning of a word is usually clear from the context, and where it is not—it does not matter to the narrative.

E. S. STEVENS.

ALLWARD

CHAPTER I

HE was conscious first of a gentle beating upon his face and hands as of a hundred soft weapons, of a continued assault, the thrust against his flesh of innumerable icy and minute swords. But his face was so chilled that it was more sensitive to the incessant onslaught than to the cold, and his hands were almost past feeling. What was it?

Rain, it was rain.

The smell of soaked and decaying leaves, a great pattering darkness; wet, growing things, sodden and icy, rising about him on either side—what were they? Where could he be? He attempted to rise, and with his inability to make a single limb or muscle fulfil the bidding of his brain, abject fear and horror grew upon him.

He tried to cry out—he could utter no sound. He made a desperate effort to articulate, but he could not bring his stiff tongue or silent throat to obey his urgent appeal. The rain was beating upon his hair, it seemed as though he were gradually melting and drowning, until he was part of the dripping undergrowth which brushed his face with a menace of death. He wondered if his eyes were opened or closed. No, they were closed, for he felt the soft belabourment of the falling rain upon the lids. Horror shut him in. He thought that he had already died, and that his dead body was being washed into mutilation by the pouring water, and in the midst of that nightmare the wet fronds of an unseen plant moved over his face, and he knew that he was alive, though the terror of

his vision was still with him. His soul cried out, his lips were frozen.

Then again he passed into a state of merciful dream, into temporal death.

An hour later, and it was dawn. The bracken, brown and draggled, the ragged winter grass, tangled and coarse, were bent and beaten, dripping ceaselessly in the soaking downpour. The oak trees, leafless and grey, lifted their naked boughs against the leaden morning. The fallen leaves at their roots glistened, sodden and flattened by the water. The dank, sweet smell of rain on the leaf-mould of many autumns went up like chill incense, through the bare twigs into the heavy sky. The ground was oozy and replete; still the rain fell monotonously, drumming out its rhythmic patter. Unceasingly it drummed and pattered; stupidly, continuously.

The big man who lay at the margin of the wood did not stir.

CHAPTER II

HE awoke to a sensation of exquisite pain. It seemed as though his body were in torture, and he uttered a sharp exclamation. His eyes were open this time, and he saw, not suddenly, but gradually, like a person recovering from an anæsthetic, who becomes slowly aware of his surroundings.

"You'd best lie still," said a voice. It was the voice of a boy, or of a young girl, but low and a little husky. There was kindness, there was threat, in the brief command.

The man realised that the pain had indeed come from an involuntary attempt to move. He let his eyes wander about his surroundings. An arm's length from his head was the roof of a long, low tent. It was so constructed that one could sit, stoop, or lie in it, but not stand upright. It was a poor affair, but neatly put together. Patched and dingy cloths and pieces of sacking, secured ingeniously by thorns, were stretched over hazel stakes driven into the ground at one end and bent into a central pole, so that the roof was hoop-shaped. It was divided into two halves, in the centre being a small, unroofed portion, through which the smoke of a fire burning on a tin tray could escape. An iron rod with a hook at one end was so driven into the ground that a pot could swing from it over the blazing wood. In the further corner of the tent a young girl of about fifteen squatted upon a heap of old sacks, whittling a piece of wood with a knife. She hummed softly as she worked. She had a quantity of black hair, parted in the middle

and plaited untidily on either side of her face. Her features were a little too heavy, and her old-young look was enhanced by a dirty grey shawl, which she wore crossed about her bosom. The man gazed at her in a manner that was half torpid. His lids were heavy, as though from a long sleep.

She lifted brown eyes from her whittling, and saw that his were open.

"How're you feelin'?" she demanded, with a sudden smile. But she did not wait for his reply.

"You'd best drink some tea," she added in a business-like tone. She reached for a chipped, blue enamel jug, and put the spout to his lips, supporting his head with one hand. He drank, half-chokingly, obediently. Her hands smelt strongly of wood smoke, the tea had long been brewed and was lukewarm and bitter.

"Where am I?" he asked in a moment. His voice sounded as if it did not belong to him. He had a difficulty in enunciating, in thinking what word to use, as if he were speaking a foreign language.

"That's the first sensible word you've a-spoke for three days."

Three days? What did she mean? Something was clouded in his brain.

"Who are you, little girl?" he got out in a moment.

"You needn't be afeard," she said pleasantly. "You're as safe as a mole beneath the ground. Dad's not said a word. Bless you, he wouldn't even call a doctor, in case-like."

He struggled with mental paralysis.

"I—don't understand—I can't remember."

"We picked you up early on Sunday morning. There you was like a log in the fern on the bank,

down ag'in t'other side of the bridge just ag'in the woods. My dad's terriers smelt you out, and then he calls out that there's a dead man lying by the bridge. My aunt come to see, and calls 'im a great fool. 'He's no more dead than you are,' she says, and they carried you along into her van. We was movin' on, and my aunt was all for sendin' my dad to call the police. But, dad, he says, 'No, leave the pore chap until he can say a word for hisself,' he says. 'The less to do with constables and such like the better,' he says."

The girl gave him a penetrating and half-curious look, then returning to her place, picked up some small pieces of chips and put them on the fire.

"You say—you picked me up by the roadside?" he enunciated painfully.

"Yes—and you was wet. How did you come there?"

"I don't know," he replied slowly. At the mere attempt to recollect, a numb pain behind his brows made him knit his forehead nervously. "I can't remember," he added, with a forced laugh.

"Was they after you?" she asked, with a carelessness which seemed to conceal information.

"They——? I—I don't know. I can't remember. I think something must have happened to me. It's very strange—I can't remember anything."

"Not nutthink at all?" she said incredulously. "You're kiddin'."

To his own surprise big tears suddenly began to well out of his eyes. They rolled down his cheeks easily, and chased each other down the rivulet they had made.

"There, there! don't cry about it," she said hastily. "No one's goin' to give you up. It's bad to see a

man a-ruvverin'. You'd best sleep again. My dad'll be back soon."

She fell to work again, humming to herself a little out of tune as she chipped and cut; half-rising at times to lift the lid from the pot suspended over the fire, and peep at its contents. His tears gradually ceased to flow, and a great and blessed drowsiness descended upon him.

He awoke two hours later and found himself being steadfastly regarded by four pairs of eyes. One belonged to the young girl he seemed to have dreamt of, another to a battered-looking man with a grey stubble growing over his chin and in patches over his face, and the two pairs left to be accounted for were the property of two small, wire-haired terriers, who lay as close to the fire in the tray as they could without singeing their noses.

"You'd be all the better for a bit of solid in yer stummick," said the man, who was eating himself.

"I feel hungry," said the big, sick man weakly, as an appetising odour in the tent filled his nostrils.

The girl rose, keeping her back bent, or she would have collided with the roof, and transferred some of the contents of the pot on to a plate.

"I'll feed 'im," she said.

"He ain't a baby," growled the man.

"He's as weak as a baby yet," she said, and brought the plate to the sick man on his bed of sacking.

"Thanks," said the sick man gratefully. Again with her proximity came the strong and acrid odour of wood smoke.

She propped him up against a bundle which she dragged under his shoulders, and fed him spoonful by spoonful.

"There's forty pound reward offered for you," said

the lined and grizzled man with dark eyes. "I seen it up to-day."

"For me?"

"It looks like it," said the other sagely. "Besides, if you wanted to keep it to yourself, you should keep holdt on your jib. You was a-talking of juries and magistrates and such-like all the time you was off your head."

"I can't remember," said the man. A teased look came into his eyes.

"Don't worrit him, dad," said the girl. "You'll make him cry again."

"Forty pound or no forty pound," said the grizzled man. "You'se safe with us. You wouldn't believe it with my repitation—me carryin' the belt for fifteen years and my father afore me, and friends with all the gentry about yer; but I was once took up meself. It was jug or pay up a fine for nothing at all, as you might say. I was having my drop in the pub with that girl's grandfather, and the village cop dropped in with his ugly fat mui—his fat face, that is; and I delled him yek on the nok just beca'se he looked so pleased with hisself. Just light-'earted with beer, I was. Bit o' fun, that's all. And they give me a month."

"I remember jumping," said the big man painfully, as though groping for hidden facts. "Nothing beyond that. Jumping from something that was going the deuce of a pace."

"Come now, you'se Allward, ain't yer?" suggested the grizzled man, point blank.

"I don't know—in the least—who I am. It will come back to me presently. Allward? Allward? The name is not familiar to me—northward, southward, eastward, westward—all-ward——"

"He's talking silly again," interpolated the girl.

"No, I am not," said the invalid. "My brain is clear enough now. But half of it is locked up—dark. I can remember jumping, and rain—and you cutting wood a little while in here—but before that everything is lost. It is a blank. I don't remember who I am, for the moment, for the moment of course. What makes you think that I am—the name you said?"

"Allward, I said, Adam Allward. I'll tell you fast enough——"

"No, dad, don't," interrupted the girl. "I won't have it. Can't you see his brain is dizzied? You'll have him ill again just as he's getting better. You tool yer jib, you'll mor him asaurus, ye boro dinnelo!"

"Call yer own dad names!" said the grizzled man.

"I'll call you worse before I've done with you. Kekker rokker a lav else I'll del you. There's time enough for that!" Her young face darkened and her hands clenched.

Her father succumbed under this amazonian threat.

"I'm off," he announced sulkily.

"Whar to?" she asked, after a pause.

"To Farley Old. The old man there is as divvy as a moon-calf, that he is. There's lots of the gentry kind of cracked, nowadays. Come an' talk to me the other day he did, an' asked me a lot o' questions. Wanted to know if I knew any pomes, and whether I believed in fairies, and what I did when I saw the moon."

"What did you say to him?"

"I said if he wanted pomes he'd better go to your Uncle Garge up ag'in Southampton, and that as for heathenish behaviour I knew better nor that. Then he shook his head, and says, 'This damned eddication,' he

says. Then he asks me about rat-catchin'. I says, 'That's my secret,' I says, 'and if I wuz to tell you, look, 'twouldn't be a secret no more. My bits of drab, the sweet pizen I makes,' I says, 'is my own secret. This dog yer, he's in the secret too,' I says, 'and he knows better nor than to tell. It's the way I makes my livin', an' if I was to tell it, I should be makin' you a present of my earnin's.' Then he give me panj kullas, and off he jalled."

"Uncle Garge don't know any pomes," she said incredulously.

"Don't he? I tell you he do. He knows a lot of them old gillis. That's all pomes is, gillis."

"Gillis is sung to music. Pome's what they learns up in school."

"You knows a lot better than your dad, my girl. That's what comes o' schoolin'. I tells you they that can't write is a lot wiser than they what can, in five times out of ten. Look at Mister Trevor as I was speaking of. A lot of good his book learnin' done him. His wife runned off and his darter killed herself."

"They say he's divvy," said the girl curiously.

Her father made his way out, stooping through the aperture, and slouched off, his two eager, bright-eyed curs following him.

"Who is that?" asked their guest.

"That's my feyther. He's called Rat-catcher Sam about yer. Whatcher makin' faces for?"

"My arm hurts a bit," said the sick man wryly.

"I'll rub it with a little grease," she said. "There's a power of healing in hedgehog fat. My aunt have rubbed granny with it scores of times for a stiff leg."

She put down the dirty plate, and going into the corner, where clothes and other household goods

seemed to be stored, fetched out a small pot. She rolled up his sleeve—he saw that it was a shabby one, and began to rub in some yellowish grease with firm young hands. The vigorous rubbing seemed to ease the pain in a miraculous manner, and through the contact he felt oddly soothed, as if virtue had passed from the young girl's strong young body into his, through her kneading finger-tips into his hairy arms, in which the big muscles were flaccid.

"Is this my coat?" he asked, looking into her face.

"No—yours was wringing wet, so we put you on some of dad's old things—you're about his size. The clothes you had on was clotheses like gen'lemen wears. There's the big fur coat what you had over 'em, over your feet." She lowered her voice. "Don't you fret about all them notes what was in yer pocket. Dad has 'em, and I'll get 'em away from him if you wants it. Dad was for keepin' it instead of the reward when he sees the notice up. But you shall have money when you wants it, never you fear."

"Money?" he repeated drowsily, "you shan't lose by keeping me—I'll make it right for you when my head's clear."

His lids were drooping, and he was soon asleep again and breathing heavily. She wasted neither words nor further rubbing on him, but gathering up the plates and unhooking the pot from over the fire, betook herself out of doors. The sun was shining though the wind was chilly, but her blood was young and her body hardy, and she did not feel the cold of the February day. A donkey was munching at the furze bushes close to the tent, a horse cropped near by, and upon a big holly bush which almost concealed the tent, some washed clouts were drying. Some spikes of furze were in blossom, and the yellow buds

showed up bravely in the sun. Two carts stood tilted, shafts upward, at a little distance, and beneath them some of the household appurtenances belonging to the tent-dwellers. A second tent, her father's, was at a little distance. Mary, having gypsy blood, was cleanly and methodical. She rinsed the plates with water from a bucket, emptied into a jar the diminished contents of the pot which she scoured, then filled a blackened kettle and went with it into the tent, the muscles of her arms, which were reddened with cold, taut with the weight. She then hung it on the hook, and putting this and that straight, she settled herself again to whittling clothes-pegs. The man in the corner slept like a dog. Once he sighed, and the girl, stopping a moment, shook back her plaits and stared at him contemplatively. He was a finely featured man of the type that is either groom or parson. Beneath his few days' beard the line of his jaw swept cleanly back to his well-set ears, which were a little pointed. Hair grew in them. His eyebrows were thick and clearly defined, and though he was young, her gypsy eyes, accustomed through long heredity to read the nature of a man by his face, saw lines of trouble, lines of impatience, lines of care. She also saw the lines that spoke of long sight, of a capacity for laughter as well as sighs.

But there was little in her face to tell what she made of him. Her expression was almost animal-like in its inscrutability. Then her untidy plaits again fell over her shoulder, and she bent to her task anew.

CHAPTER III

THE next day came and went by. The stranger woke at intervals to take food, but for the rest lay in semi-coma. The rain came beating down on the tent, which, protected as it was, and well constructed, was water-tight, warm and snug. The rain spat into the fire, and from time to time the wind drove puffs of smoke back into the tent. There was a continual tattoo of heavy drops on the roof. The sick man heard it as in a dream. It seemed infinitely pleasant to lie inert and weak in the warmth of the tent listening to the rain and the wind rushing among the tree-tops outside, hurtling, swishing, shouting through the bare branches, shaking them as a terrier shakes a rat, breasting the wood with the noise of a heavy sea breaking in a gale, bending all obstacles as a rough wooer bends a maiden pliable to freedom and roughness rather than to pleading. It seemed familiar to him to lie in a tent. Somewhere he had surely been in a tent before. But where and how? The question of his own identity worried him sub-consciously. Yet he shrank from the knowledge of it, for something told him that it was not pleasant, that his ignorance of his former self was a restful, healing ignorance.

The afternoon of the third day of his consciousness, though it was still raining and blowing, the tents were struck, and he, with the assistance of the rat-catcher, got into the larger of two carts which were standing under the trees. His head ached as after a drinking-bout, and with the weak laziness of a sick man he

watched the household goods accumulate about him. Then a smoky tarpaulin was placed over him as he lay on a heap of sacks. He scarcely found the energy to wonder what their destination might be. He did, however, ask why they were moving. Mary told him that the keepers did not allow them to camp more than two or three days in one place, and that they had been ordered to shift.

“And now we’s goin’ on to where my aunt’s camped, up ag’in Verely Wood,” she said, slinging a sackful of litter on to the summit of the medley the cart contained. “You’d best kip under cover unless you wants to get wet,” she added shortly, and he withdrew his head beneath the tarpaulin again.

They might be going to the devil for all he cared. He was possessed of an unreasoning sense of escape, of freedom, in spite of all his physical discomfort and weakness. It was odd that he could not remember from what he was escaping or why he had——and here his brain began to swim and his head to throb.

“Best come off that tack unless you want to go mad,” a warning voice seemed to say within him. And he began to wonder if he really had lost his senses.

There was a shouting, a commotion outside. He listened from the dark shelter of the tarpaulin. He heard the hoarse voice of the rat-catcher calling out directions to his daughter with good-humoured impatience. Some of what was said he did not understand. Some words, recurring again and again, were incomprehensible to him.

Mary lifted a corner of the tarpaulin.

“You all right in there?” she asked.

“Yes, thanks. There’s one thing I wanted to ask——”

"What's that?"

"Have you been talking English all the time?"

She flushed. "No, we hasn't. We'se bin talkin' our talk, what we unnerstands."

He let his head fall, relieved.

"I thought I'd forgotten the meaning of words," he said.

"We uses lots of words you wouldn't unnerstand," she said reluctantly. "Travellers' talk, that is. You bide quiet, and don't worry yerself with thinkin'."

She dropped the tarpaulin unceremoniously, and he lost sight of her battered black hat and shining rain-wet face. There was a constant pattering on the tarpaulin, occasionally exchanged for heavy drops falling with the din of little drums as they went under trees. He heard the scrunching of the wheels, the bumping and cracking of loose boards, and now and again the wheels became muted and the cart lurched violently. He guessed then that they were off the high-road. But for the most part he lay in an elysium of drowsy well-being, in the darkness of the tarpaulin, a smell as of earth mingled in his nostrils with that of tar and wood smoke, for his head was partly supported by a sack of potatoes.

The winter darkness fell before they arrived. Once they stopped at a public-house, and after an interval Mary brought out a little hot whiskey-and-water to the invalid.

"Here, you drink this," she said. "Dad's sent it out—'twill do 'ee good." She lowered her voice, and in a half-laughing way added, "You needn't fear about bein' reckernised, no one's going to know ye now you've a-got that there beard."

He drank the burning stuff immediately, and saw in the growing dusk a modern rebuilt public-house

lying in a hollow, with a sign swinging from a post. Men were grouped about the door of the bar, for it had stopped raining. A road bordered on either side with leafless beeches and oaks ascending abruptly to the left; another, skirting the hill, met it where the public-house stood; and a few yards further on, where a cluster of new-built houses and the gleam of a light in a village shop or so shone, he perceived a sign-post standing at cross-roads.

"You're travelling late," said a man, addressing the unshaven face that was peering over the edge of the cart.

Before a reply could be framed Mary had appeared from the group at the door, and answered for her protégé.

"We was waiting to see if the rain would stop. Dad allowed it would. This yer's my uncle. He's bin very ill, and he ain't quite right in the yed not yet."

"My missus got a skirt waitin' for you, Mary," said the man good-humouredly.

"Thank-you kindly. She haven't a pair of shoes what'd keep the wet out, I s'pose? I could do wi' a pair of nice strong ones. I reckon she don't wear hers too shabby, do she?"

"She might. But I'll lay you've a smaller foot than she have."

"If 'twuz bigger, look, I couldn't get into 'em."

"Don't you say as I told you to ask, my girl, or my missus'd give me what-for. But there's a pair of trousies of mine——"

"Never you fear."

"There's some of your people up at Verely now, if you're up there. I seen the tents as I come through this marning."

"If they was tents, they was none of our folk. Some dirty mumpers, I'll lay. My aunt's van's there, but she don't hold no doin's wi' low common folk."

The carts now moved on again. The tarpaulin was not pulled back, and the refugee lay gazing up at the fast darkening sky through the boughs which all but met overhead, and swayed and shook as the wind soused and rushed over them. In spite of it some birds, rejoicing that the rain had ceased, were twittering and whistling in low, calling, throaty notes which spoke of coming spring. There was a sound of interrogation in their brief phrases. The air was boundlessly sweet and fresh to him after his immurement beneath the tarpaulin. The boisterous cleanness seemed to sweep through him as it swept through the woods, and bring healing with it. Lying in the shelter of the cart he took draughts of rain-fragrant air into his lungs.

"Mary!" he called, in a diffident voice.

She came forward. She was walking in front of the cart by the horse's head, while her father with the donkey-cart went ahead, his terriers beside him.

"Are we nearly there?"

"A matter of two miles further. You want anything?"

"No."

"Feel better?"

"A heap better."

"That was that drop of tatti pani." Her teeth gleamed in a wide merry smile. "There's another of our words. I don't know why, but you kind of make me laugh."

"Why?"

"Forgettin' your own name. Tell me now, straight

and honest, don't you know who you be? You know I ain't one to tell on you."

"I don't know," he replied helplessly. "That's just all—I don't know."

She laughed, and her laughter was fresh and spontaneous.

"Dordi, dordi!" she said. "He don't remember his own name. My dear Lord love us, it's enough to make any one sav." She dropped her new tone. "My dad don't believe it. He thinks you're hidin' of it on purpose. Don't the hearin' of your own name bring it back to you?"

"What name?"

"Adam."

He was silent. Whether it was that it was really familiar, or whether it was only familiar from the rat-catcher's mention of it the other day, he could not tell.

"It may be," he said doubtfully, after a pause.

"May be what?"

"Mine."

"Well, don't look so skeered about it," she said compassionately. "I got the bit out of the paper all about it. Dad heard 'em talking about it up at the pub the day we found you, and the next day I got a bit of newspaper to wrap a bit of meat in, and there 'twuz, all about you. I saved it. You shall see it to-morrow."

In his weakness he felt a ridiculous impulse to weep. "You're very kind——" he said. "I'm no end of a nuisance."

"Kekerk, my dear. Not you. You'se welcome to my tent till you're yourself ag'in and able to get away. The longer you lies low along wi' we, the less likely they is to find you."

"But where do you sleep?"

"I curls up in dad's tan. When we moved you from aunt's van she give us an old mattress, so there's beddin' enough for three, what with your big coat. That must 've cost some money."

She sighed.

"I'll give you a good rubbin' to-night. You won't be so feeble on your perios to-morrow."

"My what?"

"If you bides along with we, you'se sartin to hear some of our talk. We talks kind of funny among ourselves. Perios legs."

He smiled faintly.

"Is it slang, or is it Romany? I didn't know any Romany-talking gypsies were left, outside books."

"Nor you wouldn't know. 'Tisn't a thing we goes telling to every one. Gypsies varmin, they says, and lumps us in with all the dirt on the road. If any one was to ask me, look, I should say, we'se just travellers, respectable travellers, known to all the gentry round abouts, I should say. But round 'bout yer, we'se known. My dad's been rat-catchin' for forty year or more. But times isn't what they was. Folks don't send for him like they used ter. Lots of the old gentry's gone, and the new ones isn't free-handed. Lots of 'em comes from Lunnun, and a fine lot they knows about the Forest. They lives in new-built houses, with servants what they've brought down with 'em, and they on'y sees the Forest when they rushes through in their motor-cars, spoilin' the roads for the likes of we. If I was to go to one of they new houses they'd bang the door in my face. With the old gentry 'twuz different. It'd be 'How are you, Mary?' and when I'd a ask if they'd a bit of poggado

hawben, I'd bring away my basket full. My aunt she used to go round reg'lar to the big houses, so did granny, but they don't now. But granny she used to do a bit of dukkerin' as well, and that brought her in a bit of luvvel. But now they lels you, as like as not, for tellin' a fortune."

"Do you tell fortunes?"

"Kekker. What's the use?"

The sound of her fresh though always husky young voice in the semi-darkness was very pleasant to him. They were bumping along off the high-road now, and soon he realised that they had come to their halting-place. Three or four filthy, unwashed children stood beneath the hollies, with bare feet and grimy faces and unwiped noses, to watch the proceedings.

"Where d'you come from?" asked Mary, as she lifted off a sack full of straw which lay on the top of the cart.

"Over there," said one of the children.

"Well, then, duckies, you clear off quick."

"Some dirty mumpers' brats," she said to the invalid. "Now you wait yer in the cart half a minute, and I'll have summat for you to sit on."

He half rose from the cart. "I can help you."

"You'd be more hinderment than help. You bide where you be. There's aunt gettin' out of her van; one finger of hers'd be worth more than your two arms."

Her voice was peremptory, and as she spoke she was already driving in stakes, spreading the straw to form a floor, and placing one of the mattresses in the cart upon it. The rat-catcher was busying himself with the donkey and horse, which had been removed from the shafts of the two carts.

The sick man was assisted to the ground, and was soon beside a fire kindled in the iron tray, in the shelter of a partially erected tent. Mary's aunt, a tall buxom woman with a much-tanned face, and a dirty but gaudy kerchief knotted around her neck, assisted her, much cheerful talk going on between them.

"You kin put up one of they tans on the bit of ground the van's been standing on, it's as dry as a bone," she said, "if your dad'll shift en a little."

The big man sat on a bucket, his head still aching like thunder, and watched them with interest. These wanderers, accustomed like Bedouins to continual change of abode, had become expert at setting down their movable dwellings. The final touches, coney-like, tailor-bird-like, of pinning corners together and securing the heterogenous covering with pin-thorns, together with the arrangement of the interior, were left for the time, but the first erection, the mere shelter, was swiftly accomplished.

Next an iron hook was driven into the earth, and a pot which the rat-catcher filled with water was soon swinging over the lighted fire. Tea, rather weak, was brewed and drunk without milk, but plenty of sugar, and a loaf cut up and divided, each person being assigned a lump of dripping.

"This yer's my Aunt Gerania what had you in her van," said Mary, indicating her relative, who had lit a short and blackened pipe, and was puffing at it with great enjoyment.

"You better, my gennleman?" inquired Aunt Gerania, with a comfortable, husky voice. She paused to spit neatly outside the tent. "Lord love my body and soul, but you'd 'a' died if my brother yer hadn't 'a' picked you up when he did. So the gavengros after ye! Well, they shan't lel you while you'se

here. A funny place to look for a gennleman what's runned away, in a tent like this yer, wouldn't it now, my gennleman! You've done 'em prapper, so you 'ave. Nor you won't forgit who helped you and looked after you, neither, will you, my gennleman, when the money's in your pocket? "

"There's forty bar reward," began the rat-catcher, removing his pipe from his mouth, his small black eyes, set in deep crow's feet, blinking like a bird's.

"You shut up now," said Mary. "I told you he said as the money'd be all right as soon as he was hisself ag'in."

"But forty bar is——"

"Don't you go ag'in Mary," chimed in her aunt. "The rakli's got more sense nor what you have when it comes to a bit of vongar, I'll lay. We all knaws wher your money do go to. Mary have her reasons."

"The gennleman's sensible enough now," grumbled the old man obstinately. "He's got my clothes to his back, and my food in his belly, and my roof over his head, and the sooner he knaws that the coppers is arter him, and that I stands to get forty bars if I gives him up, the better for he."

"Look here," interposed the stranger at last. "We'd best get to some sort of understanding. If you know who I am, you're wiser than I am. I've a brain that's like a clean slate at the present minute, and a head that aches like hell. Something's gone wrong with my brain. Who am I? Have I any relatives who are hunting me up? "

"The police is huntin' you. Forty pounds reward is what's bein' offered for you, my gennleman, and that's God's truth, s'up me Duvvel. It may be doubled by now, for all I knaws. I don't read the papers, I don't."

"It sounds melodramatic," said the stranger. He turned on Mary sharply. "Is all this true?"

She had pity on him, for perspiration stood on his forehead, knotted by the effort of thinking and the throbbing of his temples.

"You needn't worry," she said, with stolidity which hid compassion. Then she suddenly became an active partisan. "There's none of our folks would speak to dad if he wuz to give you up. It's true enough what he says. Yer's the bit of paper I told you 'bout this marning."

She produced a blood-stained and dirty piece of paper.

"Read it out, Mary," said her father. "You'se a scholar."

"I can't read it quick," said Mary, with a sudden access of shyness. "There's long words in it. Let he read it for hisself."

The stranger took the paper from her hand.

"Adam Allward, the well known philanthropist and director of the Vyse Security Bank which ceased payment yesterday morning, was, according to a sensational report, to have been arrested, owing to certain investigations which are being pursued by the police. The strictest secrecy was observed, but in spite of precautions Allward has made his escape. He left his house unknown to any one, even to Mrs. Allward, early yesterday morning, eluding the detectives which were shadowing him, and has not been seen since. A taxi-driver reports that a man in an evidently disturbed mental condition, wearing an overcoat and cap, approached him yesterday afternoon in Sackville Street, and ordered him to drive to Winchester. At Winchester the man left the taxi, telling the chauffeur to get himself a drink and sandwiches, and handing

him a sovereign, while he himself walked up and down as if in deep thought or agitation. He then got again into the taxi, and directed the chauffeur to drive towards Bournemouth. The man did so. Near Brockenhurst, however, he turned round to discover that his fare was no longer in the taxi. It is conjectured that the mysterious stranger must have leapt from the car while in motion between Lyndhurst village and Brockenhurst. The chauffeur describes his fare as a big, clean-shaven man. The cap he wore was pulled down well over his face, so that his features were more or less disguised, but when shown a photograph of Mr. Allward last night, the chauffeur thought it possible that his fare and the missing financier and philanthropist might be one and the same person. The police are now scouring the New Forest for clues."

"Well, have 'ee finished?" asked Sam, as the stranger put the piece of paper down.

But the stranger made no answer. There was a buzzing and throbbing in his temples, as he strained to remember. Whatever or whoever he might be, he had a strong conviction that he had been neither philanthropist nor financier. He pressed his hands to his forehead. Something must burst, something must give way, before he could think clearly. Who am I, who am I? was the question that battered at his paralysed brain-cells.

"Lave him be," said Aunt Gerania. "The man's all gone white."

"You'll make him bād ag'in, that's what you'll do," said Mary. "Do ye want to mor the mush?"

"Make him lel a drop of peeamexy," said Aunt Gerania. She put down her pipe and filled up her

own cup with the now dark concoction. "Yer, give him this. 'Twould upset the best on us to yer the gavmushes was arter us."

But their guest was struggling desperately, using all his forces of body and will to recover the knowledge that was just beyond his grasp. The story he had read recalled something to him. It was as if he were a drunken man blindly moving a key over the surface of a door in the hope of meeting the key-hole. Then suddenly, as if the key had found the lock, the closed door in his brain swung open—and in remembering, he fainted.

"There, I tauld you how 'twould be," said Mary. She dragged him partially outside the tent, and fetching the pail from which she had recently filled their tea-kettle, she dashed some water on the unconscious man's face with her hands. The old rat-catcher did not trouble to move, but sat inside, his knees drawn up, imperturbably smoking. To his mind the fugitive's emotion was only an added proof that he was the man whose name was on every one's lips. Finally, with a grunt, he knocked his pipe out against one of the hazel rods which supported the tent, and took himself off to chop the green furze tops he had gathered, while the women were busying themselves with the tent, into fodder for the horse and donkey. He tumbled the succulent light green prickles into an old sugar-box, and chopped them up with a sharp-edged mattock, while the animals, tied to the larger cart, lifted their drooping heads at the welcome sound. The clip-clop-clop, clip-clop-clop of this operation, already familiar to the stranger, was the first sound which met his ears when he returned to consciousness and to the knowledge of himself. There was no closed door now. He remembered everything.

He lay still, with shut eyes, adjusting himself, as it were, to his situation. He felt Mary's hand against his cheek, and smelt the eternal wood smoke and the earthy aroma which clung to her. A certain sense of the ludicrous made him smile faintly to himself. What an odd way of escape from circumstances had opened up to him by a miraculous chance!

"You're feelin' better now?" asked Mary.

"There, the poor dear, look, the way he's sweat-in'," said Aunt Gerania, with interest. "Dordi, dordi! He looks as if he'd seen a mullo. To see a girt man lyin' like that turns me!"

"I'm all right now," said the stranger, lifting himself. "I'm sorry to have gone off like that."

"You git inside by the fire," said Mary. "Yer shoulders is wet and muddy. You'll dry inside."

She helped him in, and the two women followed him.

"Don't you worry," she said kindly. "Dad have got money of yourn, and a bird in the hand is worth a rabbit in the bush, especially when the bush is a police-court. He ain't likely to give you up, never fear."

"Money?" he said abruptly. "How much?"

Mary disregarded Aunt Gerania's nudgings.

"A matter of twenty-five pound in paper money, and a gold watch, and a sort of bank-book. Then there was a bit of writing or two in a case, but there wasn't no name to them."

"Has your father got them?" asked the stranger.

"You never tauld me about the watch, Mary," put in her aunt.

Mary disregarded Aunt Gerania again.

"Dad's got 'em, I dar say."

"He'd better burn the case."

"And the money——"

"And the watch," put in Aunt Gerania.

"Your father can keep them, if he can keep his tongue too."

"No fear of that, my gennleman."

He reflected a minute.

"But what you goin' to do yerself?" asked Aunt Gerania, taking advantage of the pause. "It's not to our interest to say it, look, my gennleman, but if you wants to get off you'd best get a shillin' or two of it back."

"I don't want to get off," he said slowly. "Do you travel the country?"

"Oh yes, my gennleman. We travels from one place to another yerabouts."

"I don't know this country," he replied. "I shouldn't mind seeing it. And I've a fancy to see it as you do, to live as you do, to clear out of civilisation altogether."

"But a gennleman like you couldn't live like what we does."

"Why not? But I shall want this tent, and my keep for a bit. Your father can well afford that out of what he's got of mine."

There was a pause.

"I don't know what Sam'll say to it," said Aunt Gerania doubtfully, resuming her pipe. "Suppose the gavengros was to find out you was with us, they'd lel us. And forty pounds——"

"How do us knaw as we'd get it?" interrupted Mary sharply. "Here's twenty-five bar safe and a gold ora in dad's pocket, and to get the other we'd have to go to the police, and maybe the seshins, and a crowd of folk askin' our business. The gennleman's right: if he stays along with us, they'll never find him."

Aunt Gerania smoked meditatively.

Mary turned to the stranger.

"Our ways wun't suit you, a gennleman what's used to easy livin'."

"They will suit me well enough," he replied. "As for easy living, I've slept before now on the ground, and walked all day on an empty stomach."

Mary stared at him with interest.

"What you do that for?" she asked.

"Not on purpose," he said, with a dry smile. "For much the same reason as I'm doing this now."

"Was the cops after you?" asked Aunt Gerania.

"No," said he; "not in person. As symbols——" He broke off.

"As what?" said Mary.

"I was talking nonsense," he said. "I've always been a walker. There's a wandering instinct born in some legs. There was in mine."

"That true enough," said Aunt Gerania, spitting into the fire. "Them that's got it can't never bide in one place."

Mary's eyes travelled innocently to his calves. They were, indeed, the calves of one who had used his legs. Then they returned to his face, and one of her pretty and brilliant smiles dawned into her eyes.

"No one won't know you for a gennleman now," she said. "If you was to see yourself now you'd a-know what I means."

"And what does you mean?" asked her aunt.

For answer Mary rummaged in a corner full of odds and ends, and pulled out a looking-glass in a partially broken frame. She handed it to their guest, taking a coy look at it herself as it went by.

"Lordy, what a sight I be!" she said self-con-

sciously, smoothing her dark hair about the temples with dissatisfaction.

He took the mirror from her outstretched hand. He was surprised himself when he saw the face reflected in it. Matted hair, a three-days' growth of tawny beard, a pale dirty face, and eyes that showed mental strain peered from it at him.

"Good Lord!" he said. "They'll hang me at sight."

Mary stared at him.

"If I'm to be a vagabond and outlaw, I'll be a clean one. Your face isn't dirty. How do you wash, Mary?"

"I cleans myself in a bucket o' water," said she bashfully.

"Have you ever had a bath?"

Mary's wide and scornful smile rewarded him. "Not me," said she. "I kips myself clean without that."

"We ain't like them lousy mumpers," said Aunt Gerania, more plainly. "We never bin in the 'Ouse. That's where they baths yer. And they mumpers needs it."

Mary seemed to consider the conversation bordering on the indecent.

"D'you want a bit of a wash?" she inquired. "I'll shove you in a bucketful of water in a minnit, an' the clothes what you had on when we found yer. They'se dry by now, and them's you'se got on now is wringing where I throwed water over your yed. I got to spik to dad now."

"An' I'm goin' back to the wagon," said Aunt Gerania, tapping the ashes from her cutty. "So I'll say good-night to you, my gennleman, an' good luck. You needn't fear 'bout us tellin' on yer, or talkin' careless. We kips to ourselves. 'Tis a beautiful night, and we shall have some dry weather, please God."

CHAPTER IV

IN spite of Aunt Gerania's prognostications, when the alien awoke the next morning, it was to hear the wind rushing over the trees and a light rain pattering against the tent and the bushes beside it. He felt infinitely better after a long and dreamless sleep. He stretched his legs and came violently into contact with one of the tent-rods. Then he sat up in half humorous survey of his surroundings. During his days of delirium and illness he had not once removed his garments, or rather the clean dry shirt and pair of old trousers the rat-catcher had put on him when they had found him soaked and unconscious in the bracken. But last night, in spite of a feeling of dizziness and unsteadiness, he had undressed and used the rat-catcher's shirt in lieu of pyjamas. This morning he struggled into his coat and a pair of trousers, thrust his feet into his boots, and finding the empty bucket in which he had washed the night before, he went out to search for water for his ablutions. The wind was boisterous and chill, but not cold or violent, and he drew it into his lungs for a moment as he stood shivering in the wet fine grass and downbeaten heather and bracken.

A thin thread of smoke went up already from Aunt Gerania's caravan, but there were no signs of movement from the rat-catcher's tent. The encampment stood upon rising ground, a moor stretched away on a high plateau to their left, gradually sloping upwards. On the other side of the camp was a wood. He concluded that water was to be found somewhere at the

bottom, so followed a downhill path to the left of the camp which led into the woods. The rain was now scarcely more than a fine drizzle. The wind rushed through the bare branches of the great grey beeches, making a commotion; but within the wood, on account of the thick holly bushes which surrounded it and interspersed themselves among their bigger neighbours, breaking the force of the noisy gusts, it was still with the stillness that is always to be found beneath large trees, and is part of the soul of the forest: a stillness independent of a myriad petty sounds, such as the cracking of twigs, the rustle of a bird or rabbit in the brake, or the like. The roots of the beeches and the bases of their smooth massive trunks were coated with moss of a vivid green and a grey lichen. Beneath was a floor of fallen leaves, fox-red in their wetness, here and there broken by patches and tufts of the same velvety moss that grew on the beeches, of bracken sodden with the rain and stray roots of heather. There was a continual dripping of water, pools lay beneath the hollies, and down the sloping paths small rivulets ran, washing aside leaf-mould and leaves, and discovering gravel beneath. But it was not so easy to find water to wash with. By continually descending he did, indeed, come to a ditch partially filled with rain-water, but it was muddy. He had no mind, however, to go farther or to confess himself beaten, so he filled his bucket half full, and set out back up through the wood, somehow missing the path by which he had descended. He emerged at a spot which seemed almost identical with that upon which they had encamped, but it was bare except for a patch of yellowed grass and ashes, showing traces of a former encampment. Following the hollies along the verge of the wood, he caught sight

a yard or so further of the smoke of a fire. But this proved a disappointment. Three tents, larger and dirtier than the rat-catcher's, were indeed pitched under shelter of the hollies, but the sight of some four or five filthy little children running about barefoot, and a girl with a crying baby, made him beat a retreat. The next moment he almost ran into Aunt Gerania's yellow van. She herself stood at the top of the steps, apparently engaged in scouring some pot or pan.

"There you are then," she greeted him, measuring his unkempt length with a smile. "Why, what you bin doin' to yerself?"

"Getting fit," he replied, with an answering smile out of his green-brown eyes.

"You done it very quick," she retorted. "Breakfast will be ready in a minute."

"And I shall be ready to eat it," he replied, and retreated into the tent to dress. Mary brought him a hunk of bread and weak tea before he had finished. With his convalescence her air of protection and command had departed, and this morning she looked at him almost shyly. She saw that he was younger than she had at first taken him to be. He had the look of the class which cultivates bodily fitness and physical hardness as an end rather than a means.

"What's the time, Mary?" he asked her.

"Somewheres about seven, I dar say," she returned with a gypsy's readiness. "You're better to-day, aren't you? I wouldn't have thought you could have got out of the tent without dad to-day seein' what you was yesterday."

"It was time for me to get better," he said. "I'd been a log long enough."

She sat down on the upturned bucket at the opening of the tent and watched him comb his hair with the

small pocket-comb which was the only article of toilet he possessed.

"You won't look so bad when yer beard 've growed," she observed.

He threw a quick glance at her.

"It is kind of you to say so."

"That's cheap kindness, that is," she answered, on the defensive as if she suspected sarcasm.

"And have you had your breakfast?"

"Long time."

He was silent for a moment, and then he said, "Did you speak to your father last night about my staying with you?"

"Yes. He said you can bide, if you don't mind our rough ways."

"And the tent?"

"You can have this yer tent of mine for now. Dad'll get me some more blankets bymeby. I can slip in along o' dad, or in Aunt Gerany's van as I did last night."

"How long will your father camp here?"

"Three days, or four, maybe. They knows my father 'bout yer. He often haves a civil conversation with the keeper. They knaws he ain't like they dirty peerdies in beyind."

"Dirty what?"

"Good-fer-naughts like those over there." She moved her head in the direction of the tents he had stumbled across that morning. She smiled broadly.

"You'll pick up some of our talk if you bides with us."

He felt none of the literary interest in the fact which some men would have felt. He was no Borrovian, no philologist. To him up to the present minute, gypsies and tramps had been people whose way of life seemed to him eminently rational and free, but unsavoury at

times. He had loved the fact that there were nomads, that there was a community which defied community so to speak. He had never failed to put his hand in his pocket when he had met such a wanderer, out of instinctive sympathy with a perversity which was practical. He hated the whining of the mendicant, but the gypsy of the race-course and woodland had attracted him.

He looked at her with an odd expression in his green-brown eyes.

"I'll have to learn how to put up this tent, if I stay with you," he said. "I can manage the ordinary camping tent, but this is like a woman's dress—all pins."

"It's simple enough to put a tent up," said she. "But it ain't every one as can do it well. There's tents and tents. Look at they mumpers round the carner. There's not much wrong with the making of the tent so far as that goes, but look at them! Filthy yold rags and bits of petticoat all skewered together any'ow. I don't hold with dirt."

"Well, and what's this made of?"

"Made wi' blankets o' course—they brown blankets is the best to kip out the rain, and they be warm, too. Good enough for any one that is, though not so good as a van. But there poor creeturs, they lives no better'n rats. We don't have nothin' to do with they, except to help 'em now and again. And some of them that takes to the life from the towns is helpless as babes. We never starves. At one time of the year there's one thing to do, at another there's another. But they takes to the life accidental, through hoppin' or gettin' into trouble, and there's not much else they can do out of the hoppin' season but mump. Now a man what's traveller's blood in him will always

know what to do to earn a meal. In the spring there's plovers' eggs. One of them wouldn't know where to look for plovers' eggs, not they. You see birds and animals and such-like has their rounds, like we has our rounds, and if you knows the round, you knows where they be likely to go to. My dad 'd find a dozen eggs in a morning, and they'll not see one. He knows where to look for the nests, and he'll mark where a plover do drop a mile away. And plovers' eggs worth three-and-six a dozen in Ringwood or Christchurch where we sells them, or at one of the big houses."

"But plovers' eggs won't keep you all the year."

"You're right, my gennleman. But they's other things."

"What are they? "

She laughed.

"Makin' pegs, like I does. All you wants for that is some old tins what you gets at back doors, a few tacks, and there you are."

"And wood for the pegs."

"Well, dad cuts hazels for that, or we buys a bundle."

"And what else? " he questioned her, half for the pleasure of her husky voice and pretty eyes fixed earnestly on his.

"Ever so many things. A man can always get a bit of work from a farmer in summer time. Then there's tinkerin'. A sheet of tin on'y costs three-pence, and a man like Jeffrey Whicher, a traveller who's a cousin of dad's and camps between yer and Beaulieu, can sell saucepan covers and frazzlengros and that for a lot of money. I've a saucepan in the cart over thar what he made. The Whichers is very respectable travellers, very clean, they is."

"But suppose work is bad and it's winter?"

"Lordy, what a lot of questions you asks! Well, even then you needn't starve. There's plenty of rabbits about."

He smiled. "But poaching——"

"No 'tain't then," she said, quickly defensive. "A stoat has his rounds like you and me, and if you knows them and listens for the squeakin'——"

"I got a rabbit once like that years ago," he said. "But by accident." He drained off the tea. "Go on, what else beside rabbits?"

"Us girls can always pick up a bit."

"How?"

"Round at the doors. There's lot's of people what lets us have an old skirt or dress, or a bit of bread. Well, I got to goo along with my basket to Burley Street. Be you a-comin'?"

He reflected, coolly.

"Yes, I'll come some of the way."

"Come on, then. But unless you want folks to stare at you, you'd better put an old coat of dad's ag'in. Your coat's too new."

He had forgotten his rôle of runaway criminal, and he put on the coat with a smile flickering in his eyes. Runaway he certainly was, but as for the absconding banker, he wished him luck, and congratulated himself upon having unwittingly started the police upon a false trail. But how was it that these people, honest themselves, had befriended a man of the type they took him to be? Was it on account of some unwritten law of the road amongst people who were themselves almost outlaws, or was it because he happened to have twenty-five pounds in his pocket? Yet if they had taken it from him and left him to his fate by the roadside, no one would have been the wiser.

A watery sun shone out as they struck out across the moor, getting into a road which shone like a silver ribbon in the green-brown heather.

"Know where you be?"

"No."

"That road goes up to Pickett's Post," said she.

"It's like Dartmoor," said he.

"Have you a ben down there?"

"I know every foot of it, every inch of it. I walked over it, hunted over it, fished on it."

Her mouth became crisp with astonishment. "You're a gennleman what hunts?" she said.

"No," said he. "I gave it up. It seemed to me to be getting too snobbish for a plain man like myself; by which I mean that people who hunt for the love of it are crowded out by a lot of sportsmen who hunt because it is smart."

He spoke with a note of disgust in his voice, and then said to her, "And have you camped as far away as that?"

"No, we doesn't get down there. We goes to Poulner or Forest Corner, and Verely where we is now, and on towards Brockenhurst, Settly Brake, Brockenhurst Weirs and Fuzzy Lodge; and from there to Hill Top and Hythe Cross Roads, and then back ag'in to Verely. But I knows some gypsies what camps here about this time of year what travels between Kent and Devonsheer. They goes to Kent for the hoppin'."

"Is Verely a regular camping-ground, then?"

"Well, you see, my gennleman, it lies between two districks like. There's travellers what comes across the Avon up from Ringwood yer, and then to Poulner Pits and back through Darsset round Cranbourne Chace way. Then there's some what comes up from

Salisbury way, and they don't go no further than Verely neither."

She walked along in a somewhat slouching way, her basket supported against her left hip. He noticed a couple of silver rings on her hand, and some red beads around her brown throat. She wore a somewhat soiled and old blouse without a collar, and a kerchief of red and blue of the sort displayed in village shops knotted about her throat. For the first time it struck him that she was unusually pretty. Though her face was somewhat too long and thin, the mouth was curved wistfully and attractively, and her eyes were soft, brown and gentle like an animal's.

"Don't call me 'my gennleman,'" said he abruptly.

"What shall I call you then? Mister Allward?"

"That name's as good as any other."

"But it's yours, an't it?"

"It shall be mine because I like it. What was the first name?"

She laughed, somewhat puzzled. "You forgotten again? Adam, 'twas."

"That is better still, because it is a good earthy name. I'd like you to call me that."

She blushed and smiled. "Awright. 'Twould be safer-like. Lots of travellers is called Adam."

They passed a green on which a few geese were plucking at the muddy grass.

"I'm going back," he said. "Is this Burley Street?"

"Yes. Don't lose yerself."

She trudged on, and he went back in the direction he had come. As he walked uphill a big motor rushed up behind him. The road was narrow, and though he kept well to the left, the car did not swerve

the least fraction to the right, which would have enabled him to keep on the road. A furious toot-toot sounded in his ears, and he had to leap quickly into the muddy ditch, so slippery that he fell, while the man driving swore at him as he passed. He picked himself up and stood still for a moment, with a look in his eyes which it was a pity that the motorist missed. Then he shook himself and moved on. For the first time he realised what it must be to belong to a class which has no right to resentment, no right to pride, no inherited right to anything but the air and the sunlight and the high-road, which no man can forbid them. Small wonder that they make the best of life as they find it, just as the fox and the rat and the other vermin make their best. The earth is an impartial mother, she calls nothing unclean, she brands no living thing pariah. The outcast sleeps nearer her heart than the rich man, and she tells him secrets which the rich man may never hear. This is the true meaning of the parable of Dives and Lazarus.

Richard Lyddon knew what it was to be poor, he knew what it was to be rich. The only son of a parson's widow, who had kept herself and him on a miserable yearly sum, he had gone to school on a scholarship, and experienced all the humiliations that come of poverty to a sensitive boy. He was not of the stereotyped majority. The headmaster, who could recognise a boy with brains when he saw one, was disappointed in him and put him down as having no ambition. In after years, when Lyddon's name was well-known for its association with one of the greatest inventions of modern times, he wondered at the boy's dullness in school. Lyddon left school under a cloud. He had a passion for walking, and one half-holiday left with another boy younger than himself, and did

not return until two days later, while the country had been scoured for him. They had walked over half the byways of the county, sleeping under hedges, living like tramps. He had been sixteen at the time of this escapade, and after his expulsion, began life as an electrical engineer. He chose this career for himself. Machines were living things to him, and the power that lives in the magnet and the lightning had an uncanny affinity for him. Yet his true life was always lived apart from his work. His love of solitary walking, his hatred for the Englishman's sports, his dislike of the petty suburban life which was his mother's world, were innate, inalienable from his personality, and his surroundings were always at war against his instincts. He went through the workshops, and in the third year of his apprenticeship happened upon his first invention. It dropped into his hand. He became an inventor by accident rather than by temperament. An idea dropped into his mind as a seed drops from a passing bird into fertile ground. And more because he was lucky than because he had business capacity, the goose of fortune began to lay golden eggs for him. He was employed by a large firm which treated him with honesty and gave him a fair field. And then he made a discovery in connection with wireless telegraphy which was eagerly taken over by the famous Belloni Syndicate. It was that which made him a rich man, it was that which brought the fame for which he did not care twopence. At heart he was still the same as the boy of sixteen, who had disappeared. He was marked out as an eccentric, but as a healthy one by those who liked him.

He was only twenty-two at the time he had sold his patent to the Belloni Syndicate, and that was ten years ago. He remembered the time when he had

worked at his idea at a lonely wireless station in Cornwall, where in the intervals of absorption he had walked over every footpath within a twenty-mile radius. His work had never obsessed him, neither had its commercial value loomed large in his eyes beyond the fact that it had provided for his mother and given him a freedom which a mere toiling for daily bread had denied him.

And those ten years of success were the bitterest in his life, because of the inevitable woman who came into his life. His tragedy was that he had married her, with her restless ambition, her greed for social power, her insistent personality, her power of irritating and goading a man in the subtlest way that a woman can irritate and goad a man.

He closed the book of memory abruptly as he climbed the road over the moor which reminded him of the Dartmoor he loved. The sun had gained strength. It was one of those golden days of February which beguile one into the belief that April is at hand and that six weeks of the calendar have been dropped. He heard a lark singing, and saw it not so far above him fluttering and trilling in rapture against a pale blue sky. From the place where he stood he could see across heather hills and a watery bottom for fifteen miles. A distant shining might or might not be the sea.

Aunt Gerania greeted him on his return to the camp. She was engaged in rubbing the brass-work of the van, and hailed him with rough good-nature. The bushes about were spread with washing, with white lace curtains, blouses, aprons, undergarments and the like.

"Ah," said she, "an idle life suits you best, I'll lay, like all the men. Men's work half the time is sitting

still and smoking, and the rest of their time beating their joovels and givin' them chavis to look after."

"I've done plenty of hard work in my time," he replied, meeting the twinkle in her eye. "You are married, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes," she replied contemptuously. "I married like the rest of 'em, and a —— lot of good it is to me now my man's living with another joovel down Darset way, and the chavis growed up and gone off with men of their own. Four pretty gals I had, and they all married afore they was seventeen. Two married men what's given up travellin' and lives in houses. One's a showman, name of Gubbins, ever yeerd of him?"

"No."

"Well, he's a-made his fortin. But he don't let me see much of it, the raffaly old Gaujo that he is. The other's up ag'in London. Her man's workin' reg'lar there in some brickfields. They goes hoppin' once in a while."

"And the other two?"

"One bides down at Heavenly Bottom—you knows, up near Parkstone. Her husband's a White, and dels in gries, does a bit of harse-dealing, that is. She goes into Bournesmouth hawkin'. I shall go down to her next wik. But I can't bear hatchin' in the same place like she do. I must be on the move."

"And the other? Is she prosperous too?"

"She's a bad gal, she's broke my heart, she has. I don't know what's become of her, nor I don't want to. She takes after her father's folk, all they lot of Smith women's lubbeny—that's loose in their ways." She spat and renewed her rubbing of the door rail. "There! That's how I likes to dikk the old vardo—shining so's you can see your face in the fittings. You see I bin up early this marning to do my bit of

washin'. I knawed last night it was goin' to be fine, so I 'lowed I'd do some cleanin' and washin'."

"Let me lend a hand," said he. "I'll make your brass look like gold."

"Your hand 'd be more use in your pocket, I dar say," she retorted unbelievably. "And 'ud be more useful still if there was summat in the pocket. You polish brass! What can you do, I should like to know? Gennlemen like you's brought up to do nothin'. You'd not know how to arn yer mauro if you had to. Is there any martel thing you can do but shovel out money behind a table? You was in a bank, wasn't you?"

"Not exactly," said the impostor, with a smile. "As for earning, I could make clothes-pegs like the rest of you."

She stopped rubbing and looked at him.

"You'd never arn your bread by that. It takes time to make the pegs. Every one of 'em goes nine times through the hand, and then there's the tin to get and the tacks and the wood to buy. Then you, not being married, 'd have to hawk them round yerself, and lose a day at the making. And at the end of it all you only gets threepence a gross and that's not a fortin. Mary, she's flick of hand and works quick. But she don't depend on it. Sam's a rich man for all he lives in a tent like theseyer peerdies. He's one of them what lives poor to die rich. D'you know what he'll do with your five-and-twenty bar?"

"What?"

"Make fifty or more of 'em. Bars breeds with him. He's like that."

"But how?"

"Harses. Gries. That's the way. His rat-catchin' brings him in a good bit, but when he's put it by,

then it's harses. Then he makes a bit at the races. He never loses a penny that I've known on. He's a knowing old gairy is Sam." She gave a chuckle and then reverted to her first subject.

"Is there anything you can do?"

He remembered his proficiency as an amateur carpenter, and mentioned it. "And I can manage most machinery," he put in as if in an afterthought.

She looked dubious.

"You might get a carpenter's job, or you mightn't. Then there's your tools to buy. You might get Sam to lend you the money if you'd the offer of a safe job. And as to machinery, there ain't none yerabouts, unless 'tis a steam-roller, or a steam-harses at the fairs. Carpenterin's best. Well, that's somethin'. How did you happen to larn that? Look yer——"

She descended the steps and led him to the side of the van. The wooden corners and ends were carved into arabesques and brightly painted in yellows and reds. "There's carpentry for you! My yold mush kered that all by his kukero, and painted it he did, too. Two years ago he painted it."

"He hasn't left you long, then?" he asked.

Her hard, handsome face became set and fierce. "No, he hadn' took up with that lubbeny then. Tarned me out of the van, he did, one winter's night, and gave me a hidin'. Times isn't what they use ter be. In the old days if a man had treated his own married wife that ways, the whole tribe would have scarned him, the dog!" She turned with an abrupt gesture to the bushes and felt a muslin curtain as if to ascertain if it were dry, and then wheeled round as suddenly.

"Ah, you ain't married!"

"I am," Lyddon said dryly.

"I lay you wouldn't treat your wife so."

"My wife," said Lyddon carefully, "has left me for a long while, so that my views upon matrimony scarcely count."

"Ah, then, you knaws a little. No, you don't, neither—for no man keers. 'Tis a woman to lie beside, and a woman to do the work, and a woman to beat, and one's so good as another. But a woman gets kinder used to her man, even when he do beat her at times. Kinder faithful like a dog. And then he tarns her out—and uses her like a dog. That's what men is."

Lyddon made no reply, and her voice softened as she changed the subject.

"I tell you what. I'll spik to a man I knows up at Tharney-hill. He might know of a job of work for you. I'll tell him you got into a bit of trouble. He'll know better nor to open his mui. I'll say you're a pleasant-spoken, kushti-dikkin young chap. I always tauld Sam, 'Don't you give him up to the gavmushes, he's done no great harm,' I says."

Remembering previous conversations in the tent, the refugee doubted her unbiased partisanship, but he accepted it as a token of future good-will. The old woman interested him. Both she and Mary were refreshing to him who was sated with artificiality.

"You're going to have your bit of dinner in with me to-day," Aunt Gerania added with a friendly smile. "Mary said I wuz to look after you and cook you a bit. Like to see inside the vardo?"

He accepted the invitation and gazed into the van, pleasing her by his admiration of it.

"There, you see how comfortable we old didakais lives. There's my stove. That cost a lot of money it did, when it was noo. This yer van is nigh on

sixty year old. My father had it built for him and then 'twas my brother's and then when he died it come to me. There's a fotygraph of my eldest gal Grace, what she had took down in Dover. Kushtidikkin rakli, ain't she? Pretty teeth she've a-got, with a parting in the middle, which means she'll die rich, and that's true enough. She's got seven by now, four boys and three gals. She's dark. A reg'lar Romany she is, favours the Stanleys. The next gal, Rosie, 's fair, a real pretty gal she is, too, but I ain't got no picter of her. There's my mush. He's dark, ain't he? A reg'lar kaulo one. His mother was a Stanley, a nice old 'ooman, much she'd have to say to him now if she was alive."

She dwelt on the photograph of her husband, a good-looking ruffianly looking fellow, for a minute in silence. It was brown and faded, and must have been taken many years ago. Looking at her, her visitor thought that in spite of her touzled and somewhat dirty hair and the hard lines in her face, that man and wife must have made a handsome pair in their youth.

"How do you make your living now?" he asked her.

"Oh, the gals sends me a bit now an' then, and he sends me a bit, and I makes a bit. One old woman don't need a lot of keep. 'Tis the young ones that's breedin' that costs most."

Then she started. "Look at thatyer haura! It's close on twelve, and the pot's not on the fire yet. You wanted a job—you peel they taters,"

CHAPTER V

THE rat-catcher came back with his terriers at tea-time full of genial silence and evident content with his day's work. He admitted to having been to Christchurch, and had apparently called in for a glass at various public-houses on the way home. Mary returned shortly afterwards. She had walked to Ringwood, had hawked her pegs all day, and was tired. There were dark rings below her pretty eyes though she said a man had given her a lift part of the way home.

Her aunt cynically bade her remember that when her time came she'd have a chavi to carry round as well. "That takes the life of you," she added. "Got to give the chavi the burk as well as carrying him and the basket."

"Mary's delikit," said the rat-catcher with indulgent pride. "Always wuz."

"They're the ones as gets the most," said Aunt Gerania.

"Not me," said Mary. "No mush for me. I'll kip meself."

"That's right, my dear. So you says. Then comes along a nice young chap an' asks you, and you fergits all that. Lordy, you might as well talk to thisyer kavvi——" she pointed to the kettle, "as get sense from a young gal when she's being coorted by a handsome young feller. It's my belief that the Lord sends 'em mad at sich times, otherwise the stock of chavis would run out, I'd allow. Then comes the

first chavi. 'That's all right,' she says, and eats it up with choomers—that's kisses, my gennleman, some nice Romany gal'll teach you that—and then another, and then another, an' she knows by then what's afore her. When they're young they're arm-achy, and when they're old there're heart-achy."

"Lordy, Aunt Gerany, how you do talk. You on'y had four. Chuck us a bit of bread."

"Six I had, two on 'em died. But look at that poor old peerdie in the bushes over thar. She's just had her fifteenth. Nine livin'."

"Who's that?" asked the rat-catcher drowsily.

"Woman name of Smith. Leonard Smith was her husband's name. *You* knows well enough. They're makin' back for Devonsheer. He never married her. They lives like dogs."

"Smith?" Lyddon repeated.

"Not the travellin' Smiths. She's a gauji woman, not even a posh an' posh. There's lots of Smiths. I'm a Smith, and I was barn a James. My gran'-mother on me mother's side was a Lee, and she married a showman. Ah, there's no more Lees yer-about now. Prapper old style didakais they was. *They* could talk so's you couldn't understand 'em."

"So kin I, and so kin you," said the rat-catcher.

"Ah, not like what they could. A lav here an' there, like, but we doesn't rokker amongst ourselves like what they useter."

"I lay there's few words I don't understand," said the rat-catcher, with a touch of sleepy pugnacity.

"Well, 'tis no good now," said Aunt Gerania. "'Tain't kep' to travellers now. There's that young feller what comes here in the van what's got texes painted all over it. He says to me, 'That's a vardo, ain't it?' 'I don't know, my dear,' I says; 'I'm on'y

a traveller.' I don't understand that haythenish gibberish. Got it out of a book, he did."

"Leave a woman to talk," muttered the rat-catcher maliciously, with a misty glance at their guest. "No wonder her old man left her. Her jib wagged too fast for he. Give's another drop of peeamexy. Not too black, my dear, my throat's dry."

"It hadn't ought to be," said Aunt Gerania fiercely. She got up and prepared to leave the tent. "I'll be going back to the waggon, Mary."

"There now, dad, now you've druv her off," said Mary reproachfully. "You knaws she can't bear any-one but herself to speak of Tom."

"—— her, the ——," said the rat-catcher, "and Tom too. Talk a man's head off she would——" His head nodded forward and he began to drowse.

Mary cast a glance half humorous, half-philosophical at him and fed the fire with pieces of stick. The square of old carpet that was placed over the opening of the tent at night-time or to ensure privacy or warmth was thrown back, and the grey naked arms of the beech-trees showed above the hollies against the pale turquoise of the sky. Something in their stateliness and silence made Lyddon think of dumb genii, infinitely protective, infinitely remote. He had not been listening to all the conversation, but had sat still letting his mind drift. The talk of the gypsy-people became to him part of the voice of the forest—the birds, the woodpecker that flew past with hoarse laughter, the chatter of the sparrows in the hollies.

"Do you like trees, Mary?" he asked.

"I likes them well enough," she said with slight surprise.

"You would miss them if you never saw them?"

"I dar say. I likes the noise they makes of a windy

night. I don't know as I wouldn't sooner sleep in a tent than in a van. Now my aunt, she thinks tents is low. She've always slept in a van. She says the shakin' of it in a wind is a thing that'd put her to sleep anywheres. It's bein' used to it."

"Then you wouldn't give up your life?"

"Travellin'? I dunno."

"If you were rich——?" he asked, testing her.

But her imagination failed to rise to such a height.

"I dunno——"

"Supposing some one gave you a hundred pounds to-morrow, what would you do?"

She thought. "Buy a bit of ground," she said, "and a good horse and cart."

"And another hundred?"

"I'd buy a nice dress and long white gloves to go to the races, and put a bit on. And some rings and that. Yes, and a new accordion."

"Can you play the accordion? I wish you would play it to me one day. It's jolly when it's played well."

"Yes, but not like what dad does. If he wan't asleep, I'd get him to play a tune. He plays for me to dance to, now and agen."

"You dance as well—what a lot of accomplishments."

The wide, pretty, distrustful smile flashed into her face.

"Where did you learn to read?"

"Up at the school. Tharneyhill."

"But if you were travelling all the time?"

"I bides up there, sometimes."

There was a silence.

He looked at her as she stood outlined against the growing dusk. Though she was hardly more than a

child, her bosom had a full swelling outline that gave promise of fruitful maternity in the days of servitude to come. She bent and broke a lichen-covered bough, dead and brittle, against her knee, and threw it bit by bit into the blaze. Her eyes were wistful and mysterious with the mystery of young womanhood.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked after a pause. He felt it almost an indelicacy to ask her. What right had he, a man and a stranger, to probe her thought, or that vague quiescence which lies deeper than thought?

"Me?"

"Yes."

"I don't rightly know. I might've been thinkin' I'd fry some taters in with the sausages I bro't home."

"Oh. It sounds savoury," said their guest, recovering himself.

"I likes sausages," she said, with dreamy beauty in her eyes.

"They are always associated with Sunday morning for me," he replied, with a smile.

"Why?"

"In one place where I lived before I married, the woman who cooked for me thought it against sabbatarian principle to give me anything else for breakfast on Sunday."

"You married?" she asked curiously. "Yes, I remembers now, that bit of paper said there was a Mrs. Allward. I some'ow thought it was yer mother. Any kids?"

"No," he said.

"Oh. Won't she wonder where you've a-got to?" Lyddon's long-featured, pleasant face hardened and

then relaxed. "Possibly," he said with an odd smile coming into his green-brown eyes.

"You should write her a word," said Mary judiciously, after thought. "'Tain't fair on a woman to let her think you'se drowned or somethin'. That's just like men. On'y thinks of themselves."

"H'm," said he lightly. "What's the time?"

She looked mischievous. "That's like dad. When you wants he to do anything what he don't want to do, he begins to talk of the weather."

"Well, we will talk of the weather," said he coolly, accepting a cigarette which she had rolled for him with her brown fingers.

"It's goin' to be fine," said Mary, sniffing the air.

"Let's hear how you know," he said, smiling at her air of confidence.

"Smoke's goin' up straight. Then it smells that way. Wind's a-blowin' from the right place. Birds sings like it. It'll keep fine for a day or so." She threw another piece of stick into the blaze. "Lot of good it'll do me to-morrer. Can't even get a bit of washin' done."

"Why on earth can't you?"

"Sunday. Can't go about hawkin' or wash of a Sunday. Lots of 'em does, but we never does a thing of a Sunday." She broke off. "I yeerd somethin' to-day in Ringwood. Shall I tell you?"

"Yes, please do," he said, watching her with the kind of interest that a man feels for something unconscious and young and natural.

"They said 'twas in the paper Adam Allward 'ad got off to South America. So they got off your track."

"That's lucky," he replied with the shadow of a smile.

"What I says. But what're they after you for? I don't sim to understand rightly."

He tried to explain to her in simple language the wrong which the man he was impersonating had committed. It was rather difficult to make her unsophisticated mind grasp what he meant, but he succeeded partially, for she said presently—

"Same's as if I was to give you a shilling to kip for me and you wuz to put it on a gry at the races."

"Exactly."

"But if you'd a-won they'd 'av got back their money safe enough."

"Of course."

"Well, I don't see as that were a thing to go to prison for if you meant honest. If I wanted to put a koruna on a harse and hadn't but three of my own and two of yourn, I'd risk the five, and if I'd lost I'd make it up to you bimeby. But law's a funny thing. It don't give you no time like."

"It's a dangerous game," said he.

"So's most games as is worth anything. Bettin's dangerous, but you often makes a bit by it."

"But dishonesty——"

"Who was talkin' of dishonesty? No, I said if you meant honest."

She fell into a reverie, holding her knees, and swinging herself backwards.

"There's all sarts of honesty in the world," she said after a moment. "See how big thisyer forest is. Well, it all belongs to the King they say. He don't use it, I don't know as ever he come down yer. We lives in it, and we knaws the ways of it, and the creeturs in it, and yet if a keeper was to find me a-settin' of a trap for a rabbit, he'd lel me, and I'd git a fortnight. Does the King eat any of they

rabbits? No. 'Cos why? He has too much to eat as 'tis. And yet he begurtches us ours. I don't say we set traps. Anyways not often. There's other ways of catching a shushy if you knows them. And then look at pheasants' eggs. They gennlemen what comes to shoot the pheasants don't want 'em like what we do, yet we darsen't touch an egg or a feather. We gets lelled for it all the same. There's Jeffry Whicher, what married dad's cousin. He's a travellin' sweep. He was campin' down Beaulieu Rails once when a constable name of Jim Reece come along with a gennleman and a keeper. Jeffry just got back, and his wife was out hawkin'. 'I'll show you whar your pheasant eggs goes to, sir,' says Jim Reece, and he says to Jeffry, 'You hand out they eggs.' 'I an't got no eggs,' says Jeffry; 'I bin out sweepin' all day, and the missis is out with her basket.' Jim Reece says, 'None of they lies to me,' and he goes to the carner, and there, under a bit of something, was a dozen eggs. He knew where to find them, 'cos why? he'd put them there hissself."

"But why should he do that? "

"Wanted to get hissself made Inspector. Poor Jeffry, what wouldn't take a ha'penny if you dropped it in the road, got a month for that. Oh, Reece is bad. He's sarved other travellers the same ways. Who'd take a traveller's word against his, look? Why, once he went to a pub. Two respectable travellers was there. They had their pint and went off. What does Reece do? There's a mug the landlord was proud on, some old valyable stuff it was. He slips it under his coat, goes out and throws it over the hedge. Then he runs after the poor didakais and says, 'Yer, you bin throwed a mug over the hedge, you come back and pay for it.' They come quite willin', thinkin'

there was some mistake. 'We didn't throw no mug,' they says. 'Ho, didn't you? I seen you,' he says, and there 'twas, and off to the lock-up they goes. And Reece gets 'em sayin' what a smart feller he is. 'Twud sarve he right if some one was to do he in one of these days."

"What a confounded shame," exclaimed Lyddon. "Do you mean to tell me that a village policeman can be such a swine as that and not be found out?"

"You ask dad, or Aunt Gerany, or any one. They'll tell you."

"If I caught a man at such a dirty trick, I'd horse-whip him."

"Ah, but we'd get months for doin' that," she said, sighing.

Within the tent the old rat-catcher snored gently.

The noise reminded her of the realities of the present.

"I must cook they sausages," she said. "And there's cups to wash."

"I'll do that. Where's the water?"

"There on'y a drop, and I needs most of that. Take a swab of grass. D'you know I often thinks that life's all spent in cleanin' and dirtyin' again? You cleans a thing just so that it shall get dirty again, over and over again. And when it ain't wuth cleanin', you throws it away."

"Perhaps you are stating a philosophical truth," said the alien half to himself.

"Men don't know much about cleanin'," she added. "They leaves all that to we. A man's always dirtying, a woman's always cleanin'. That's one thing I'm glad we've no van. There's lots of cleanin' about a van if you wants to keep it nice—the stove to

black, the chimney to brush out, the brass to shine, and the place to sweep out and tidy——”

“I have heard of a philosopher—a man—who lived in a hut,” said Lyddon. “He brought home a pretty pebble that he’d found on his rambles. But one day he found it dusty, and then he threw it away—it was only one more thing to dust.”

“He hadn’t got no wife then,” she observed, “or he’d a-kept it and made her dust it. Now in a tent you has just what you can’t do without, and that’s less nor you would think, not bein’ used to it.”

She went to her basket, which she had deposited in one of the carts, and taking from it a bag containing some sausages, soon had them frizzling over the fire, becoming stiff, brown and succulent.

Out of the darkness came three barefoot and unkempt children, and stared wistfully at the operations. Mary set their guest to hold the pan, while she cut off three large slices of bread, dipped them in the sizzling, spitting grease, and put them in the hands outstretched for them.

Like wild sprites of the wood, the children took the gift without thanks, and disappeared into the darkness among the holly bushes.

CHAPTER VI

THE runaway awoke to the fresh, happy din of song-birds, as he had slept overnight to the calling of owls. Twittering, sweetening, fluting, calling, trilling, it was a tumult of happy, planless sound. Just above his head, almost in the tent, as it seemed, came the liquid whistling of a blackbird, and from its proximity the predominant songster in that ecstatic chorus. The man stirred, one of the rods which supported his tent was shaken, and there was a whirring of wings so close that he guessed the bird had been perched on the little edifice itself. He pulled himself up, drew aside one of the brown and smoky blankets which were his shelter, and looked out. The glossy leaves of the holly reflected light, a silver mist of sunshine lay upon the trees beyond, the wet grass and heather was veiled with a grey and shining cobweb, in which thousands of tiny drops shone yellow, white and blue.

“Here’s spring,” thought Lyddon, with a quickening of the pulses, “and it’s only February.”

If he had been in London, in that house which for him had been a prison and a torture-house, the blinds would still have been drawn. He, because of his instinct, the instinct that made every spring fret his spirit with longing to be away, would have known that somewhere birds were singing and the catkins full of pollen, but for the men and women he met it would have been merely a bright day and that is all. Who would know that spring had come at all in

London but for the flower-sellers and the milliners? And it does not come a day before April, though the carefully planted crocuses in the parks bloom to the noise of motor buses. But in the country it heralds itself in January even. To-day, but for the leafless trees, it might have been May. A wisp of wood smoke drifted across the hollies towards him, smelling pungent and sweet. He washed himself in a drop of water with which he had been careful to provide himself overnight, dressed and went out, disturbing a couple of chaffinches who were disputing some crumbs and scraps they had found.

To-day there was no stir in their little camp as yet. The smoke which he had smelt must have come from elsewhere, but he did not trouble to trace it. He walked on, filled with an exhilaration which drew him to the open moor beyond the belt of hollies, the windless uplands stretching away to the shining of the sea behind Bournemouth.

But as he went he chanced upon squatters earlier abroad than himself. It was from their camp that the smoke had proceeded, for thick blue clouds were going up from a just-lit fire outside the tent. The tent was not the usual gypsy erection, but a tarpaulin cover, neatly stitched into shape, like the covers one sees over life-boats on board a steamer. A man was coaxing the wet wood to burn, a woman stood beside him suckling a child.

The man looked up from his labours, saw him pausing, and called out a brief "Marning."

The woman, who was plain and shabby, gazed up for an instant incuriously.

"Have you got such a thing as a match about you?" called out the man. "I spent all I had on this b—— fire."

Lyddon felt in his pockets mechanically, and found a silver vesta-box in his trousers' pocket. He proffered a vesta to the tramp, who muttered thanks and lit a pipe, casting a look of curiosity on the box.

"Why, that's silver, ain't it, matey?"

"I think so." He eyed the tent. "That's an odd-looking construction you've got there, isn't it?"

"Ah, I see you starin' at it! Lots of travellers have looked at that and asked me where I got it. See them eyelet holes? We can draw it tight to on a cold night. Better nor they gypsy ragbags, ain't it? Got it from a man down Romsey way. You down on your luck?"

"It depends what you call luck," said Lyddon.

"Ah, you're right there," said the man. "What's luck to a rabbit is pizen to a fox, often enough."

He cast a cunning look at the stranger.

"Not been on the roads long, I can see. Well, there's many worse lives. I was born respectable. My father was a grocer down in Christchurch. But I wouldn't go back to house-dwellin' now if you was to pay me handsome. My old woman there, she was barn and bred on the roads. But I larnt her a thing or two. She wouldn't ever have thought of a tent like this. They sticks to their bits of rags and thorns. Now what they spends on a donkey and cart, I spends on this tent. A handcart's good enough for us. My old woman and me's the donkeys. But we sleeps water-tight and snug."

Lyddon assented, bade them good-morning and moved on. He did not take to the man, he was loud-voiced and bombastic, his eye was shifty and beery. The woman, poor, draggled creature, looked brow-beaten.

"Thank you, sir," she called out, as Lyddon turned away. He took the little piece of servility as a covert and pathetic plea, and regretted that his pockets were as bare as theirs, barer, probably. What curious twist in this man's disposition had led him away from the paths of prosperity to the ways of roving and freedom and cleanliness, he wondered, and resolved to ask Mary about them.

The sun was warm on his back, and he got out on to the road which connected with the main road across the heath, then walked briskly uphill. Larks were singing, and his keen ears detected a faint and monotonous ding-ding far away that told him that somewhere bells were sounding for an early service. He strode on, his heart young within him. Was it possible that he could be the same man who had felt nausea and revolt that day when he had sat in the high, square chamber of horrors in the Law Courts but a little while ago? Ten years of falsehood and suppression had dropped from him. By one mad impulse towards freedom, he had leapt through the tiny ropes which had gradually woven themselves about him in ten foolish years. He was free.

Suddenly came a singing, whirring, steady sound. He stopped as if held to the earth by some fascination. Five great birds were winging their way steadily across the luminous blue of the pale spring sky. The sun shone on their wings and breasts, and as they came nearer he saw that they were white swans, their long necks stretched out, their bodies flattened, their great wings singing rhythmically, a mighty sound with something royal in it. He watched them fly over the heath in a straight line, crossing the heath-clad hills, fly over the long, brown,

boggy valley and on towards the blue distance and the marshes beyond. As one gazes at an aeroplane till the last faint speck fades against the sky, so he gazed until they passed out of sight, tirelessly flying.

As he turned from watching them, he saw a one-legged man approaching up the hill. His head was bent, and from time to time he stopped and prodded at the dust of the ditch by the roadside with his wooden leg as a man does who is looking for some not very large object lost in the road.

"Are you looking for anything?" Lyddon asked.

The old man started.

"Have'ee found it?"

"What?"

"A little red bag? Not seen such a thing, have'ee?"

"No."

"'Twould be worth a shillin' to 'ee if you had," said the old man stolidly. "There's no value to 'em if you comes to that, look. But no more there is to a heap of things what people hunts out and puts in glass cases. But there was one in that bag what I'd be sorry to lose. Napoleon to the very life. The very daps of 'n, cocked hat an' hunched shoulders and all."

"But what was it?" Lyddon asked.

"A stone, a common stone what I found in the road. Ah, you didn't expect that, young feller, I can see. All the times you've walked the roads, you've never troubled to look what lay there right at your feet. I on'y met one as ever did, and he was a stone-breaker—found one shaped just like a baby, he did and he kept it up on his mantelshelf. Nature is a wonderful thing, for them as has eyes to see.

Nature can beat the sculptors with the leastest trouble in the world. You look here!" He fumbled at an inside pocket and produced a small bag with the words "National Provincial Bank" upon it. This he untied, and took from it a small, irregularly shaped pebble, which he placed in the other's hand.

"What's that?" he asked triumphantly. "Hold it up against the light—not like that, sideways. What d'you see?"

"It is like a face," said Lyddon, humouring him and taken with his madness.

"A face, aye but whose face? I've thought many times of sendin' it as a present to her grandson, but I couldn't bring myself to part with it. Look again—why, you must be blind! 'Tis her gracious Majesty Queen Victoria, as in life she was, poor lady. I warr'nt the King'd like that. Here's another. Who's this then?"

"Gladstone?" hazarded the other.

"Right. You must have had some eddication in your day. You couldn't miss that nose, could you—a very noble nose. And, talkin' of noses, who's this?"

"Cyrano de Bergerac?" answered Lyddon, without thinking.

"Never heard of him. Ally Sloper! Thought you'd have seen that. Well, I can see you weren't brought up to be what you've become now. Here's the price of a drink for you—where's your hand, then? There, if you sees that bag, bring it for me to the little pub up on the hill a mile further on. If you say it's for Jimmy Green, they'll know. I must have dropped it through a hole in my coat-pocket as I came back last night from seeing my married darter down there at Burley Street."

To receive a gratuity is always an experience which disconcerts those who have never had money dropped into their palms since the days of nephewhood. The recipient of the 'stone-finder's twopence was still petrified, his hand unclosed, while the one-legged man, with a nod and a "Good-day to you," began his slow progress up the hill in search of the missing treasure. Then the younger man's fingers closed over the coins. How instinctive had been the clinging to a convention which divides all mankind into those who tip and those who receive tips!

He turned at length to go back. It was, in truth, a lovely day, and the mist had cleared a little out of the valley already, leaving purple shadows, which gathered the blue plum-dust of distance as they stretched toward the bright sea. His legs were full of the joy of walking, the road was an invitation. A whimsical idea came to him that the reason why nomad peoples always moved westward was because, when they started out at break of day with their caravan, the colours and contours which met the eye in the west were more attractive than the view to the east in the eye of the sun, for the blaze of light destroys colour and form. A man instinctively travels with his back to the sun, and during the first and energetic portion of the day, Nature spreads her allurements in the west—the charm of blue hills and enamelled vales, of exquisite skies and glittering mirages.

It was the call of hunger that drew him back to the camp, however, and a savoury smell told him that the women were cooking.

"It's Sunday," said Mary, "and a man down Ringwood let me have two pair of kippers cheap. Other days we does with bread and tea."

"And don't want more'n that now," growled the rat-catcher, who had slept later than usual and was feeling the effect of his potations of the night before.

"Three 'apence a pair, they was, and I got 'em from 'im at a penny a pair. You needn't eat yours if you doesn't want to, dad. He wouldn't have give them to *you* so cheap. He always gives 'em to me a bit off because of me danyors."

"Of your what?" asked their guest.

She indicated two rows of pretty white teeth.

"These."

"What call've you got to go savvin at 'im?" asked her father sullenly. "If I catches you at it you'll get a hidin'."

"There ain't no harm in smilin', Adam, now is there?" she asked placidly. "'Tis better nor cryin', now isn't it? I smiles at everybody on some days. Can't help it like. Smiles to myself as I jals along the drum."

"'Tis health, more'n happiness," said Aunt Gerania, who had finished her kipper and was filling her cutty with shag. "I used to be the same when I was a bit of a rakli like you. You won't sav so easy when you're rummered."

Mary looked at Lyddon with a look which said, "She is on the old subject."

But even Aunt Gerania's misanthropy was warmed by the sun.

"But there, there's all sorts of folk to the world, and you may be luckier nor most. As for what I was sayin', health's a wonderful thing. I can't think what folks what lives in houses ever does to keep theirselves out of sick-beds. They sits indoors rain or shine, and kills theirselves with kindness. I never

had a drop of physic all my barn days, not in all my meriben. What do it put on the bottles? Something about on'y takin' one spoonful. There now—that proves it to be pizen—if you drank the lot 'twould kill you as like as not. The word in Romany talk for medicine's 'drab,' my gennleman, and drab's likewise the lay for pizen, and a doctor in our talk's a drabengro, which isn't nothing else but a pizener."

"Did you ever yeer old Noah Lee tell the story of what happened to his grandfather?" asked the rat-catcher.

"I don't know as I ever did," said Aunt Gerania.

"Well, they was camped up on a girt moor up somewhar's north, some place as I never been to. And Noah's grandfather was a young man then, so by his tellin' it must've bin over a hundred year ago, more like two hundred, I'd allow. Noah's grandfather was married to a pretty gal name of Cooper, a reg'lar Romany raunie, she wur, with bal as kaulo as the night, and a girt silver necklace around her pretty little neck. But she was naflo. A sart of fiery sickness, 'twas, and he was half divvy because he thought she might die. He rode ten mile to the doctor's house, but doctor had gone to dikk a woman what was brought to bed somewheres, half-way between the place where they was atchin' and the doctor's house. They telled him exactly whar the doctor would come along the road, and that he'd be drivin', and sure enough down that road come a harse and trap, the only one he'd seen in ten miles. "'Tis the drabengro,' says Noah's grandfather, and he stopped him, and pootchered 'n civil to come and look at his wife.

"'I'm not the doctor,' says the man. Noah's

grandfather thought he was telling lies to get out of comin'. Doctors often don't fancy comin' to a camp.

" 'I'll give you a bar,' says Noah's grandfather.

" 'Damn yer bars,' says he, and tries to drive on. But Noah's grandfather's blood was up, and he got hold of the hoss's head and farced him to get down. He had a gun I'd allow. Anyways, he farced the man to ride on the mare's back with him over the moor to whar they was atchin'. The man was frightened almost to death, and thought he'd be mored for certain. Noah gets him down, and takes him into the vurdo where his joovel was lying. 'You give her some physic, what'll cure her,' says he, 'or you'll get a harse-whipping.' The man said he wasn't no doctor and he hadn't no physic. Noah's grandfather still thinks it all lies, and told him to make some, somehow. So the man began to think he was mad, and to get out of it he said, 'Very well,' he said, 'leave me here alone with her five minutes and I'll make up some pills,' he said. Sure enough, when the door opened after a bit, there he had some pills. Queer-lookin' things they was, too. 'Give her two to-night,' he says, 'and I'll send you more in the marning.' Noah gave him the bar, and took him back to where his hoss an' cart was drawed up by the road, and let him go. Sure enough, his wife took a turn that night for the better. Next marning up rides another man. 'I'm the doctor,' said he, 'where's yer wife?' 'But who was it last night?' says Noah, lookin' dazed. 'That was a friend of mine,' says the drabengro, laughing. 'He says you handled him pretty rough, and gave him a guinea for it.' 'But the medicine,' says Noah's grandfather. 'He made they pills,' says the drabengro, 'out of a

little soap and salt what he found in the cupboard in the van. 'They won't hurt your wife,' he says. No more they did. Noah says his grandfather always said 'twas they soap pills what put her right. But he was prapper angry, all the same."

"Hark to that fly a-buzzing," said Mary, when the tale was done. "One'd think we was near summer. What luck've you had to-day, Adam? You was up afore all of us."

Lyddon put his hand into his pocket and produced twopence triumphantly.

"Who gave you that?" asked Aunt Gerania.

"A man who calls himself Jimmy Green." He told them of his adventure with the stone-collector.

"I knaws him," said the rat-catcher, sending out a cloud of smoke. "A crazy old chap what's always digging about for stones. He used to be a publican down Fardingbridge way, and made his bit of money and come back to live here where he was barn. All the road-menders for miles around do know he. A pile of stones in the road'll keep he busy for hours. If you'd a-found that bag, now, it'd a-arned you a shilling."

"I warr'nt I'd a-got more'n twopence out of him, anyways," said Aunt Gerania. "A man's never no good at dra'in' the money out of the pocket. I've a mind to goo up there on the drum now and use me yokkers a bit and see if I can't dikk that old kissi of his. Anyway, I might meet him, and ask him civil if he's found it yet."

"You'll lose your time," said the rat-catcher. "I'm off to cut some fuzz-tops. Mary, you'll have to fetch some sticks presently. This lot's near done."

"I'll get some wood," said Lyddon.

“Then I’ll come with you an’ help you,” said Mary. “There’s no wood round yer, we shall have to go a mile or two for it.”

He wandered about among the trees until she appeared. He had never had much to do with women, except with the one who had been the curse of ten years of his life, not because she had been a luridly bad woman, but because she was herself. Marjorie Lyddon was socially ambitious. She had the superficial charms of easy conversation, seeming sympathy, culture and good breeding. In marrying Lyddon, however, she had known by the parasitical instinct which is inborn in some women, that she was attaching herself to a man who must make his way. He was introduced to her as a genius. She was resolved that he should be a successful genius, that he should be what she and her friends called “a brilliant man.” She adored success, and she saw nascent success in Lyddon.

She also saw that if he were allowed to please himself, he would let himself be forgotten. He must meet people, important people, influential people. He must not let people forget that he was the Lyddon whose brains had helped to furnish the world with what was almost a sixth sense, a new dimension. She fought his love of solitude, his preference for country life, his lack of ambition, with the real cleverness which she possessed. She manœuvred him into contracts which would keep him working, producing and chained to the fruits of his success. If Lyddon had been a weaker man, she would have succeeded. But he evaded her, and constantly evaded her. His work might keep him chained, but she soon found that the social life in which she attempted to enmesh him

could not hold him. Neither could his amusements. He gained a reputation for eccentricity, for unsociability. To escape from London, not by motor-car, but to some distant station from which he could ride or go afoot, was a frequent employment of his week-ends. She could never succeed but partially with this big, odd genius of a husband of hers. At best he was a leashed kestrel, with his eyes fixed on freedom. Of the chain she was at least sure. There was no man to fill his place, and while a man is useful he is not allowed to drop out. His very success, his very name, were chains about his feet. He was the property of the Belloni Syndicate.

Lyddon disliked the would-be society woman, he was bored by the middle-class woman, and in any case had as little to do with women as possible. He often thought of his marriage now as something which had happened to some one that was not himself. Yet he had changed little from the shy, clever boy who had made his own maps of three counties, marking the footpaths that he loved, the swamps that were fordable, the ways that avoided the dwellings of men. His love of wandering had never taken him out of England. It was the English hedgerows and coppices and downs that he loved. The happiest time of his life was the time he had spent in that lonely wireless station in Cornwall.

Then lately had come the beginning of the end, and the misery and vulgarity of it was still with him. He was one of those men to whom publicity is absolutely abhorrent. Yet publicity of the most sordid kind had been turned upon their case, upon his private life, upon hers, upon people he would have cut off his little finger to save from annoyance.

Mary joined him, and they began to walk up past

the camp together. She glanced at him with a glance that was half-shy.

"Didn't you want to come?"

"Why, yes," he said absently. "Why?"

"You was frowning."

He met her soft brown eyes with a quick look of apology. "Was I? Perhaps I was seeing ghosts."

Her face illuminated, she thought he was jesting with her.

"Shall I tell you what I was really thinking?" he said.

"Yes." She was serious again.

"I'd never known people like you before, and after all the talk there is about the way to get all that's good out of life, you and your people seem to have hit upon the very best—and without talking of it either."

She looked at him doubtfully.

"It's no life for you," she said. "We lives that way because we are barn to it and has to put up with it. You likes it because you've only tried it a little while. I often thinks I'd like to be a reg'lar lady and do nothin' at all."

"But you make a mistake," said Lyddon. "They work hard."

She smiled incredulity.

"They does what they likes to do," she persisted.

"On the contrary," said Lyddon, "they so often do what they don't want to do that they end by forgetting what they want to do. They've no real wants. They've crowded them out."

"Get on," she said incredulously. "You're talkin' clever, and you know I don't like that. I specks there's not much difference, if you comes to that."

They got a lot to choose from, I got a little. Lord, I wishes I had some money."

"To buy the bit of ground and the accordion?" he asked.

"I don't mean that ways. I'd like to have some one to do the cleanin' and cookin' for a bit. I'd like to go to one of they swell hotels and sit there with a grand dress on me back and ride in a carriage. One of they Stanley girls did once. Married a real rye with lots of money. But she didn't have no more to do with her folks but once, and that was at the races somewheres. There she wuz, sat up in a coach with a hat all covered with feathers and a silk dress on her, not like our sart of dresses, but just like a real raunie, and she drinkin' and eatin' with the rest of the ryes and raunies. And suddenly she looked and saw a lot of our folk all together making a bit of peass in a carner by themselves. Laughin' and dancin' they was, owin' to havin' won a lot on a gry. And she jumped up and left the coach and jined in with her own folk, and her husband didn't find her till the end of the day. And then she was half morto (drunk). 'Twas a kind of home-sickness as much as the levina what she'd a-peed, and when she saw him she swore everything she could lay her tongue to. But he didn't mind. He sat down and had a drop of levina too, quite civil, and then when he got her home, they say, he koored her black and blue. But they was fond on each other, they was. He was a queer kind of gennleman, look, and knawed all sarts of furrin languages."

"When was this?"

"Oh, a long time ago. When Aunt Gerany was a bit of a thing her mother'd a-told her."

"Could you like a man who beat you black and blue?"

She reflected. "P'raps," she said.

"Are all women like that?"

"I dunno."

"Has any one ever beaten you?"

"Dad've given me a hidin' lots of times," she said, with no change of expression.

He looked at her with a strange feeling that was not all horror, but wonder tinged with the fascination which brutal facts have for those who are not brutal. She, fine, young, straight-limbed creature, with those soft eyes, to be beaten—she, so essentially feminine. She caught his gaze and laughed.

"Well, you do look at me funny," she said, jerking her ear-rings back as she pushed her untidy hair out of her eyes.

"I was wondering what it would feel like to have beaten some one you were fond of. I've beaten a dog I loved better than any human being—but couldn't beat a woman."

"Then some would get the better of you," she replied. "They do say as Aunt Gerany took a whip to her man once. But that was when she was young. She hasn't the strength to stand up against he now, and he've a-koored her enough to make up for that whippin', I'd allow. But he's bad, and so's that old joovel he've a-took up with."

"I wonder what sort of man you'll marry," said he.

"I dunno," she answered expressionlessly.

They had reached a wood overhanging the great valley which runs from Ringwood to Christchurch, near the high point where in olden times beacons were lighted. The fox-red floor, with patches of moss like green plush, was knotted here and there with roots; the trees were far smaller than the giants of Verely, for they had been dwarfed by the unbroken

force of many gales. Through their trunks the valley shone like a vision.

Collecting the grey, fallen wood, hither and thither they wandered, calling to each other from time to time, their voices echoing. A couple of black swine went grunting through the trees, nosing among the beech-mast for something edible. Otherwise they were disturbed by no other living thing. In half-an-hour they had collected two large bundles, which they secured with the rope they had brought.

"How hot it is," said Mary. "Who'd think it was winter? I'm sweatin'."

"Then rest a little before we go back," he suggested.

"If you likes," she assented, and by a common impulse they walked to the brow of gorse and heather. Here, out of the wind, it was sunny and fresh. The evergreen of the hollies, the yellow furze and the withered brown of the heather told little of the season. Below them, bright with the sun, stretched the same long, watery bottom, across which the swans had flown in the morning. Mary flung herself full-length in the heather and supported her chin in her hands.

"How the larks do sing," said she. "If this weather holds, there'll be plovers's eggs afore long."

He sat down beside her, and she altered her position a little to make room for him between two dwarf gorse bushes. He watched her small, silver-ringed hands breaking off pieces of brittle heather and crumbling off the withered buds.

"Still hot?" he asked her.

"Yes, ain't you? My blood's always warm. The leastest thing do make me sweat." She spoke dreamily with the same peculiarly gentle beauty in her face which had drawn him before, and robbed her words

of their coarseness. "Nice here, ain't it?" she went on, and then, after a pause, she added, "I likes the spring, though some'ow, I don't know why, it kind of makes you sad-and-silly feelin'. Makes you want things, and you don't know what 'tis you're wantin'."

He was surprised at her sudden mood of introspection and self-revelation.

"You feel that?" he said.

"It makes you feel kind of old," she said, fixing her brown eyes on some point beyond the sunny mist of the distance. "Eggs a-hatchin', leaves comin' out, and young, new creeturs everywhere, and you the same silly old thing that you was in the winter, and the year afore. Seems funny, don't it, if you think of it that ways?"

"It doesn't seem funny to me at all," he returned, gazing, too, at the hills painted thin against the horizon. "I've felt it too, spring after spring. It's something less than heart-ache, something more than regret, half restlessness, half hankering for hills beyond the stars. It makes one keen to be off, to see new country, to go on new roads—to see oneself from a new angle, to live as one dreamt of living somewhere before one was born. It isn't that we don't change, that makes that spring feeling, I think. We do change, we're always changing. That's the pity of it. All the best things rush past before we know we've missed them. It comes to one in springtime like a vision, in flashes. The day before you found me I saw crocuses in a London Park."

She turned her eyes on him, hardly understanding his words, yet half aware in an articulate fashion of what was behind them. She was also aware, in the same dim way, that he was not a man who made self-

revelations, and that he had made one to her because he liked her.

"You don't like town life?" she said simply.

"Like it! Good God! I haven't a single thing in common with it."

"And yet you lived there?"

"No," he said, "I made a miserable compromise. The other thing—the life that you and I are leading now, didn't occur to me, I didn't realise that it was possible somehow to shake oneself entirely free. Yet it has been simple—accidental——"

She was puzzled, still thinking him the runaway banker. Then she said suddenly—

"I don't want to get old."

He turned and considered the lithe, young figure.

"But you're a mere child. You're not in danger of it for years."

"I'll have to get old some day," said she. "I wouldn't like to be no younger than I am now though. There was too many of us chavis."

"I didn't know you had any brothers or sisters, Mary."

"I'd four brothers and two sisters. Me brothers all jalled to Ameriky. One sister died, the other married a man what drove about an oil-cart 'bout yer. Now he's an oil and colour shop in the Ditches in Southampton."

"I hope she is happy," he said, smiling at her out of his clear, pleasant eyes.

"As happy as most," said Mary flatly, scattering more dried heather bells. "I don't hold with marryin' a man what isn't a traveller," she continued. "Lordy, I wouldn't be her, not for anythink."

"Isn't her husband kind to her?"

"Oh, he's kind enough. It's the bothers of it. The

inspector comin' to drive the chavis off to school, and the people what bothers her to come to church or chapel, and the noise and cackle that there is with other folks lookin' into her business."

He laughed. "That's the town life we were talking about."

"P'raps 'tis. You can't never get no quiet in the town. Fancy lyin' about in a town like we are now. Why, the gavmush would kick you up and push you on before you'd a-know where you was. Folks'd never leave us alone anywheres if they'd a-help it. What business is it of theirs what we does with ourselves?"

"But here they don't leave you alone entirely, do they?" he said. "What about the keepers?"

She sighed. "Here we can dodge them a bit. I've often yeerd dad say that there's nothin' gives he more pleasure than to put up the tan on a bit of ground where there's a notice up to say no camp's allowed. It's some time afore they takes the trouble to come round and tarn you off. But they's fewer and fewer campin' grounds left. Soon they'll take them all away."

"And what will you and your people do then?"

"Go to Ameriky," she replied, with a deep sigh. "But I don't want'er go. You see, I was barn in the Forest and lived yer all my days, and it wun't be the same nowheres else. Here we knows all the beats, and all the paths and the keepers and everythink; there we'd be no better than furriners."

"I should like to know what harm you do that can be compared with the devastation left by townspeople when they come out picnicking, or motorists who destroy country roads," said he.

"Picknickers mess up prapper, don't they? An'

build fires on the ground, and the keepers don't say a lav to 'em. That's law, that is. Some of they keepers is dogs."

She took up a piece of dead bracken and chewed it between her teeth. Then she lifted her face to him and smiled her peculiarly beautiful smile.

"Funny sort of gaujo you are, an't you?" she said.

"Am I? What makes you think that?"

"I dunno. I wouldn't talk to any of our men as I bin talkin' to you. They'd think I was divvy. I means about spring, and all that. But you're different. You takes it nat'ral. What's yer wife like, Adam?"

He was silent, surprised at the question.

She was looking under her thick lashes at him in a way that was half mischief, half cunning. "Aunt Gerany told me she were a vassable piece of goods."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"She've gone off with another mush, haven't she?"

"That's not for you or me to talk about together, child," he said, with sudden withdrawal of confidence. "Look here, your father will be wanting those sticks if we're to cook dinner to-day. We must start back."

"Awright," said she, in the voice of one accustomed to obey and placate the male. She threw her bundle over her shoulder, holding it by the end of rope, and began to walk back, kicking occasionally at the dead leaves with her boots, and gazing back at him with a smile. Half reluctantly, he took his bundle too and followed her.

CHAPTER VII

DINNER, for which Lyddon felt a healthy readiness, was composed of a stew of rabbit. The history of the rabbit was not vouchsafed, but it was excellent eating, and all four partook of it largely, after which the bones were tossed to the two terriers, who had sat throughout the meal upon their stumpy tails, their bodies quivering with anticipation. Lyddon sat on an upturned bucket; the rat-catcher, whose constitution defied rheumatism, on the ground; and the two women just within the open part of the tent. The peace of plenitude was upon the rat-catcher; with the look of a man settling down to comfort he filled and lit his blackened clay. Aunt Gerania followed his example. Mary rolled herself a "fag," and did the same for Lyddon.

"I got another swaygler—pipe—in the van what my old mush used to smoke," said Aunt Gerania. "You'se welcome to it, my gennleman. Fags is for young gals; there's no fruitiness in a fag."

He thanked her, but declined.

"He ain't goin' to smoke your old man's pipe," said Mary, scandalised at her suggestion.

"This cigarette is fruity enough," said Lyddon. "It is stronger tobacco than I ever use." He availed himself of the piece of burning stick which the girl held, and she lit her own afterwards. Within the tent, upon which the sun had shone for an hour, adding its warmth to that of the fire, it was hot in spite of the open entrance, and the girl lolled back

lazily against a bag of straw, clasping one knee in her favourite attitude, and unconsciously displaying the line of her firm young breast. The heat gave her a rich colour, her well-moulded throat was like old ivory, and the red beads and bright kerchief afforded the contrast which her skin needed.

"What a beautiful young animal it is," thought Lyddon.

She smiled at him, as if conscious that he was admiring her, but accepting it as natural. It was a gentle, half-melancholy smile.

"I feels that sleepy," she declared, with half-shut eyes.

"Well, goo to sleep then; who's hinderin' you?" said Aunt Gerania.

The hindrance came suddenly from without. There was the sound of a footfall upon withered leaves, the footfall of a man with heavy shoes who trod without regard for obstacles and did not pick his way. None of the four outcasts took notice of it, thinking it one of the men from the two neighbouring camps.

But in the next instant, without warning, a voice broke into their peace, and a man stood in their midst as suddenly as though he had dropped from the clouds.

He was a tall lean man of some sixty-seven years; his hair was white, his face pale with the pallor of old age, but healthy as if much of his life had been spent beneath the sky. His nose and eyes were his most salient features. The former, wide-nostrilled, hooked, high-bridged, noble, was the nose of a patriarch, of a man of strong personality. The eyes, dark and piercing, were half veiled by horny lids, almost lashless, though the brows above them were thick and white and shaggy. His beard and mous-

tache hid the lower portion of his face; the clothes he wore were those of a well-to-do peasant in his Sunday best.

Aunt Gerania sat up with a jerk.

“Whoever will be saved——” began the old man in a loud, sonorous voice, raising one hand.

Mary stared at him with a dumb, fascinated look; the rat-catcher continued to smoke as if no one was there.

The stranger took not the slightest notice of his frigid reception. He began to quote Scriptural warnings, and then, putting his head right into the tent between the two scared women, he continued—

“Look at this fire! It’s burning, isn’t it, friends? It is red-hot! That’s what hell is like, my friends—that’s what the hell is like that’s preparing for you if you don’t repent!” His eye caught a small wood-louse laboriously travelling up the brown blanket. He picked it up between his finger and thumb, and dropped it into the midst of the sticks. There was a little sputter.

“That poor insect has felt for a second what you will feel for centuries and centuries, friends, if you don’t turn to Him that’s waiting for you to repent. Think of it! Think of the agony of it, the terrible pain——”

“Begone, you old varmint,” said Aunt Gerania, recovering herself. “Call yourself deligious and ta’k that ways, scaring the life outer folks what’ve done you no harm! We’s honest people; what call’s it of yours to come droppin’ our live-stock into the fire? The Lard’ll know better than to listen to the likes o’ you when He’s dealin’ out fire and brimstone. You lel yourself off, and if you wants to preach, you goo and preach to they as wants to hear you.”

"Woman, if this night thy soul be required of thee——"

Aunt Gerania sprang up in a sudden rage, scattering the plates and sending the terriers flying.

"Be off with you, you —— old creetur." She spat over her left shoulder. "Goo an' take yer unlucky face somewheres else, you nasty dirty old vagabone!" A torrent of abuse fell from her lips.

The old man stood unmoved, his voice raised to drown hers. The din was indescribable. The rat-catcher smoked on placidly, Mary sat half hypnotised, Lyddon had an hysterical impulse to laugh. Aunt Gerania screamed every epithet she could lay her tongue to, and from the stranger every now and again, when she paused for breath, came disjointed sentences of biblical sound, heard only in the brief lull.

Finally, as though in calm disdain rather than in intimidation, the tall stranger moved off, and they heard his voice raised in a bass chant.

Aunt Gerania sank down speechless and trembling.

The rat-catcher looked at her.

"Whyever did you set on the poor old dinnlo like that, Gerany? There ain't no harm to him."

"Comin' yer with his unlucky face!" she gasped. "Talk of me dyin' to-night, can he? Well, I hope he'll die to-night, and I warr'nt medeari Duvvlus won't be as pleased to see him as the old fool reckons for."

"Shoon to him," said the rat-catcher, smoking placidly. "Singin' yims to the hollies."

"A fine deligious man he is," said Aunt Gerania, still panting. "When've he ever put his hand into his pocket for the likes of us? All he troubles about is hissself and makin' other folks listen to his stinkin' rafully old ta'k. He'd 've stood here preachin' till

star-time if I'd 'a' let him, the old vagabone. And him not a rashai neither. Rashais is bound to preach, 'tis their business, look," she said, calming a little, and turning to Lyddon. "They'se paid for it, and they sets about it civil. But they darsen't come here with their talk; they knows better nor that."

"A rashai's a parson," Mary explained to Lyddon. "You fergits the rashai in the wagon painted with texes," said she to her aunt.

"There's no harm in he," said the old woman. "He's civil, he is; and he don't wish you may die."

"There's no harm in this old feller neither," persisted the rat-catcher. "He's not right in his sherro. There's lots of folks what's not right in their sherro that's never chivved in the divvyken. I yeerd tell down at the public that on his weddin' day, as he come out of church, de dikked some tents stickin' out of the fuzz-bushes. He left the young joovel he'd just rummered, and off he went, and stayed preachin' to them till it was dark."

"I warr'nt his joovel wished she'd a-lelled some other mush."

"If he catches her a-laughin', they say, he ta'ks at her all night."

"Dordi! if I'd a mush like that there old jookel, I'd sooner sove in the tober. She oughter del him when he gets ta'kin'."

"It's a ladge he didn't rummer tute, Gerany," remarked the rat-catcher, with a quiet grin. "It's a pity he didn't marry you."

She replied with a remark in the Romany best untranslated, and then turned to Lyddon.

"I'm all against they folks what comes and ta'ks deligious to us," said she. "Us gypsy women works

hard all our lives for every bit of bread we eats, and we don't have no time like the ladies what sits still in their houses to pray to God about things—we has to go out and arn something. But He'll not tarn us out of heaven for that. He died to save us all, now, didn't He? That's what I says. If I wuz to pray for daily bread without goin' out to arn it, 'twudn't drop from heaven, look."

Lyddon uttered a soothing commonplace, and Aunt Gerania relit her pipe.

"My old mother, she wuz a good old woman. She liked her drop of tattì panni when she could get it, but who don't? When she was a-dyin' we sent for the rashai, but he never come for three days, and then she was very far gone. 'Come and read prayers out of the Bible,'¹ says she to him when he comed. And when he got prayin', she says to him, 'I can say that I never telled any one anything that was untrue, and never acted dishonest by any one all my life.' When he come out he says to me, 'I'd no notion,' says he, 'that your mother was such a good old woman.' Seein' her goo by in the cart, look, smokin' her cutty, and smilin', he never thought to find how deligious she was. Just afore she died, she hollered me from the van. 'Come, Gerania,' she says, 'I sees a beautiful garden full of flowers.' 'What colour is the flowers, mother?' I says. 'All colours,' she says, 'but most on 'em white. Some on 'em's faded,' she says. I went in, and she says, 'You should have come when I hollered you, and then you'd 've seen 'em.'"

"She used to sell flowers over in Christchurch," said the rat-catcher in explanation to Lyddon.

¹ Kushti lays out of the Boro Lil are much appreciated by New Forest gypsies.

"It wasn't they flowers she saw," said Aunt Gerania indignantly. Her dark eyes were brimming with tears. "'Don't you see nobody standing there?'" I says. 'No, no one,' she says; 'on'y the beautiful flowers.' That was just afore she died. She was a good woman, the poor old dear, if ever there was one. My dad died when we were little, and she had to arn for us all—a loaf of bread had to last us for three days then, I can tell you."

"But how did she earn it?" asked Lyddon.

"Oh, by sellin' flowers and pegs and that, and doin' a bit of dookerin' now and agen. There was some folks as was good to us. Once she got a bar by dookerin' and that was all through an artis' gennleman what lived down against Lyndhurst. We was camped up by Minstead Mill, and there was two ladies stayin' up at the Compton Arms. When my mother called in at the gennleman's with her basket one day the two ladies wuz there, lookin' at his picters. He always had a pleasant word for her, and the two ladies they asked her to dooker them. She says, 'Not to-day, my pretty ladies, the stars isn't right for it, but I'll come and dooker you to-morrow up by Stoney-cross.' She said that artful, look, because if a lady or gennleman puts their hand in their pocket sudden, without expectin' it, it's sixpence instead of a shilling. But if they knows you're comin' a-purpose to see them, they has to give you a bit extry so as not to look mean. And these was rich, look. Besides, my mother wuz afraid they might smell the drop of drink she'd had that day. So she says, 'If I tells you true, you'll not fergit to treat the poor gypsy woman handsome, will you, my pretties?' That evenin' she went up to the gennleman and says she, 'For the love of Miduvvlus, my dear,' says she, 'tell me all about

they gaujis. I got to dooker them to-morrow.' The artis' he laughed to bust hisself, an' he told her all that she wanted to know, 'cos he knowed them up in Lunnon. And the next day when they came to be dookered, you should have seen their faces! She'd dookered them as they'd never been dookered before. 'Lard bless us and save us,' they says to each other, 'the woman's a witch—that she is!' And they give her a bar, that they did—a golden suverin."

"Do you tell fortunes?" Lyddon asked.

"Sometimes," she replied cautiously. "At a house where I calls sometimes there was a young lady as wanted the cards laid for her, but I said I couldn't do it, because the other ladies is deligious, and the'se good customers of mine. Besides, you has to be careful these days, or they lels you for it." A profound melancholy darkened her face as she puffed at her pipe, the melancholy of one who felt the hand of civilisation was against her mode of life and her shifts to get a living.

Mary raised herself, leant forward and threw the end of her cigarette, which she had smoked until it burnt her lips, into the fire.

"I'm goin' into the wood for a bit," she said abruptly, getting to her feet. "You comin', Adam?"

He had a self-protective instinct against her as she stood there, her dark, thin face full of splendid colour, her silver rings gleaming on her brown and smoky hands, and replied that he thought he would remain.

"Awright," she said indifferently. She shook wood-ash and tobacco-ash off her skirts, settled her gaudy kerchief, and began to walk away. Then she paused and turned round.

"You might come, look," said she, with her persuasive, curiously attractive smile. "I likes to talk to some one, and there's nuthin' to do."

"There's fuzz to be gathered," said the rat-catcher.

"That ain't his job, it's yours."

"All right," said Lyddon, "I'll go with you and we'll bring back some furze." He caught the hook which the rat-catcher tossed him, and followed the girl into the brown and silver silence of the wood. They did not desecrate it, except for the sound of disturbed leaves and breaking twigs caused by their tread. An old woman, her face so furrowed by age and hard work as to be almost inhuman, passed them with a bundle of wood on her back, a quarter of a mile further on, and gazed at them without speaking. She was the widow of an old deer-poacher, but had the forester's instinctive hostility for nomads. Her eyes beneath their wrinkled lids were hard as stones as she looked at the young man and girl.

Something in the inquisitiveness of her gaze seemed to couple them together, and Lyddon bestirred himself suddenly to break the silence which they had kept, and they talked of such subjects as were near to his heart: the gradual encroachments of landowners and builders upon footpaths that were only useful to vagrants, who were powerless to dispute their right of way; of the changing of the land into the hands of landowners who had no love for it, and no tolerance for such as they, but looked upon it solely as a money-producing property. He found Mary as intelligent as he had guessed her to be. Like most nomads, she was quick of understanding, just in her judgment.

"Father saw the keeper this marning while we was gettin' sticks," said she at length. "We shall leave to-morrow."

"What a pity. I like this wood. Is it for Thorneyhill?"

"That's right. Aunt Gerania's goin' to speak for you for a job of carpentering, if you can do it."

He was amused to see that he had been taken seriously. But he was in the mood to take whatever came to him.

"She've taken a fancy to you, she have."

"Well, that's mutual. I admire your Aunt Gerania as much as her name, which is one I never heard before."

"Funny sart of name, I calls it," Mary returned. "If we goes up there, Adam, I shall bide along with my other aunt, and Aunt Gerany will goo down to Heavenly Bottom for a bit with her darter Julia. Dad may goo off to Ringwood on a rat-catchin' job. So you'd best keep in the hollies near aunt's house, then we shall be near and be able to help you a bit. They's lots of mumpers in the hollies, poor creeturs, but you needn't have nothin' to say to they. One of aunt's girls'll keep an eye on the tent while you goes to work."

"Look here," he said, "when I made that bargain with you, I didn't mean to hang on and be a nuisance. I can shift for myself as well as any one."

"I knaws that. But we does what we likes to do. Besides, dad've got twenty-five pound of yourn, and if you looked as if you didn't belong to none of us, the keepers might be askin' questions."

Still the idea of the change to Thorneyhill was not pleasant to him. To live in a wood with Mary and her father was one thing, to live near a village, in close daily touch with relatives who might have neither the attractions of cleanliness or primitiveness, was another.

"I don't fancy settling down," said he. "I thought you were travelling."

"So we shall ag'in, after a bit. We generally bides about here till May. And then we goes up country, and you might come along with us. You could earn a bit, like we does, and maybe we could travel a bit further nor what we does most years. We could get jobs along the road."

"I should like that," he replied. "Your aunt is a house-dweller?"

"She've a-lived in a house for thirty years and paid her rent reg'lar, or she'd a-been turned out," said Mary. "Leastways sometimes they goes strawberry-pickin' or hoppin'."

"In Kent?"

"No, 'bout yer, up against Farnham and Alton and that."

"Oh," he said absently.

Perhaps she divined something of what was passing in his mind, for she remarked, "They won't bother you. I'll tell them you wants to bide quiet. They're respectable folks what knows how to kip their place, look."

They were in the deeps of the great leaf-paved wood, as vast and enclosed as the Hall of Columns in Karnak. Against the sky the network of twigs was tinged with red like the red of young blood, the buds which would presently, as in miracle, become light green. The enormous girth of the beeches, overgrown here and there with the vivid, sudden green of the moss, was worthy of their gaunt branches, spread high overhead in grey, naked beauty. There was in the air the bitter smell of damp, dead leaves, the subtle perfume of the earth, and the strange, occult, exciting magnetism of spring. It was as if

the wood had a vast, slow, obscure personality, which was beginning to wake to the passion of spring. Lyddon, all his life abnormally sensitive to atmosphere, just as he had a sixth sense with regard to those forces of Nature which had made his genius what it was, felt this personality of the wood sweep through his whole being, as a wind sweeps over a field of grass, bending it, thrilling it.

Mary had come to a standstill, and stood silent, her hand against the bole of a great beech, in an attitude of tension. She was part of the wood, and was unconscious of it as a cave-woman. There was something entirely primitive about her that made her seem part of the forest as a squirrel or a bird is part of the forest.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked mechanically.

She made no answer, but placed her hand on his arm, her mouth forming a "Ssh!"

He listened, but heard nothing that singled itself out of the usual sounds which make the undertones of a stillness: rustlings here, the faint, papery shiver of some dried leaves, the chirping of some birds.

Suddenly she motioned to him to remain where he was, and, lithe and silent as a young Indian, she crept off in the direction of some holly bushes and tufts of heather in a clearing some hundred yards further. He stood obedient and motionless where she had left him.

She disappeared, and in three minutes he saw her emerge, flushed and triumphant.

"There's luck for you!" In her hand was the limp, furry body of a rabbit. "I yeerd it squeaking, and I thought it wuz bein' caught by a stoat. But

'twas caught in a trap. None of my settin', but findin's keepin'!"

"It's dead!"

"Course it is. I squeezed its throat."

He looked at her hands involuntarily, and saw a slight blood-stain on one of them. She wiped it unconcernedly on her dress.

"Where shall we put it?" she asked.

"Let me carry it."

"And if a keeper wuz to come along, he wouldn't be likely to believe the trap was none of our settin', now would he! Yer, there's a big pocket in that coat of dad's what you got on. Slip it in; it's carried many another."

The warm body of the little animal was deposited in the coat pocket before he realised what he was doing. One of Lyddon's peculiarities was a dislike of killing any animal, great or small. He was a good shot, but rarely accepted an invitation to shoot because of the nausea he felt when he saw the dead birds he had killed so neatly.

"Poor little beast," he said involuntarily.

She laughed. "Shushies has to take their chance like we has to take our chance."

"You are as ruthless as any other wild animal."

She flushed, not understanding what he meant, and yet suspecting that he was referring to some finer feeling which she did not possess.

"We kills because we wants to eat," she said crudely. "You'se always had your killin' done for you. It's all what you're used to. I lay you'd kill a flea if you wuz to see one."

"There's an interval between the sheep in the field and the chop on the plate that I prefer not to think

about," he said. "I eat the chop, of course. There is some blood on your hand."

She put it mechanically to her mouth, moistened it, and gave it another rub on her skirt.

"How funny you do talk," she said, deciding to take him, after all, as a joke.

CHAPTER VIII

THE next morning was fine but overcast. The sky was grey and soft; there was a rawness in the air which seemed to have set the year back again. This did not prevent the birds from singing lustily. The rat-catcher was up betimes, and by nine o'clock the tents were up and the carts packed, the horse and donkey harnessed, and the caravan, too, in starting trim. It was settled that they should divide into two parties. The caravan, which was heavy and must keep to the high-road, would follow the longer route through Burley Street and Burley village on its way to Parkestone; the rat-catcher would accompany his sister with the horse and cart that far, having business at the "public," while Mary and Lyddon, with the donkey-cart, would take the uneven track over Burley Beacon to the Thorneyhill and Christchurch highway.

There was the business of getting the caravan started—Aunt Gerania's horse was old, cunning and lazy, and jibbed in a way which would have discouraged a carter. But only for a few moments; the rat-catcher's gypsy blandishments and the shoulders of the men to the wheels of the vehicle dissuaded him from his mood of obduracy, and the van was soon lumbering out of the wood, all its crockery clattering and its appendages swinging; had crossed the piece of moor and begun its steadier progress on the road. Mary and Lyddon watched the yellow house on wheels until it was out of sight. The rat-catcher followed. There was no need for the other two to make an early start, and they proceeded to remove the traces of their

occupation as far as possible, for their reputation and favour were at stake. The New Forest gypsy leaves little litter and no dirt behind him; he stays so short a time that the grass is not yellowed. A patch where the fire-tray has stood, a forgotten rag on a furze-bush is all the trace which he leaves. A picnic-party will wreak more harm in a wood in a day than a true New Forest gypsy by a week's occupation.

Then Mary shouted to the donkey, which stood in the annoyingly humble attitude of asses, its head down-drooped, its expression one of endless patience. The small grey animal tugged obediently, and, knowing the way, pulled the light cart by itself into the uneven track which communicated with the high-road.

They went over the same ground which they had walked the day before when stick-collecting. To-day spring was hiding, in an access of shyness: wanton yesterday, she was acting the part of a prude to-day. The long valley beyond the wood was milkied over with grey mist, and looked desolate and lifeless. It seemed from the lowness of the clouds that some miles away it must be raining.

"Will it be wet to-day?" he asked his companion.

She glanced about her.

"No," she said moodily.

"I should say it would."

"Well, you'd say wrong."

"You're very quiet this morning."

"Am I?" She smiled. "Well, what is there to say?"

"That is just what makes it pleasant to be with you," he remarked suddenly. "You've what is rare—the sense to be silent when you've nothing to say."

"Did your wife ta'k a lot, then?" she asked curiously.

"I was not speaking of her. Most women are restless when they are not talking. They fidget or wonder what is the matter."

She stared at him with simple eyes, as brown as the leaves underfoot.

"That's one of the diseases of civilisation," he said: "the inability to keep one's tongue or one's mind still for ten consecutive minutes."

"What kind of minnits those?" she asked, puzzled.

"Ten minutes by the clock."

"Do ladies talk such an awful lot, then?"

He laughed in genuine amusement.

"Do you, when you're with them?" she persisted.

"I never could. I was always afraid of women."

"You afraid of women?" She smiled.

"You are afraid of no one, I suppose," he said.

"Oh yes, I be. There's some folk I'd run a mile sooner than speak to. There's one keeper I'm afeerd of. When I was little I useter holler till I was blue if I seed a gavmush. But that was because they'd tell me the policeman was a-comin' to take me away. 'Here, the gavmush's a-wellin',' my mother useter say; 'he'll lel you and koor you' (take you and beat you, that is). I ain't frightened of most people, look. If I was to meet a ghost I'd be skeered, I think, but I never seen one. I goes by the mullen-tan double-quick in the dark, though."

"What's the mullen-tan?"

"The churchyard, where they buries the fokey."

"But why should they stay by their graves, the poor ghosts! Why, if I were a ghost, I should want to go to all the places where I'd been happy. I should

want to walk over Dartmoor and wait for sunrise over the tors—I'd want to tramp over all the country I'd loved, and sit in the little inns where I'd drunk beer or slept."

"So'd I," said she, with much interest. "But the good ones is gone to heaven, look; it's on'y the bad ones what stays about and skeers people. Least, I don't know. When any on us dies, we burns all their clotheses and things—or if we didn't we should be mulleni—see them agen, I means."

"If your aunt were to die, you'd burn that best shawl of hers, that she's so proud of?"

"Yes."

"And the van?"

"No," she said doubtfully. "Though in the old time they useter. My grandfather's wagon was burnt when he died, and all the gypsies come for miles around to see the buryin'."

"But why?"

"I dunno." She laughed and added, "P'raps the waggon and clotheses has got their ghosteses too, and the dead folk uses them."

"That's a very old idea, Mary," he said. "The Egyptians had it thousands of years ago."

"Well, there now!" she exclaimed, wondering.

"But to burn things that may be useful to the living seems a pity."

"It do sim a pity sometimes," said she. "There's old Abram Stanley, what used to play the fiddle at the fairs when Aunt Gerany was little. She says when he died they burnt his two fiddles and the baize bags they was in, and the ribbons he used to tie 'em up with when he played at the fairs, or a weddin', or down at Burley Club. He could play anythink, he could. They burnt a carnet, too, and a drum; I

don't know if he played 'em, but all the lot went into the fire. You should hear Aunt Gerania tell about his buryin'."

"I should like to."

"'Tis what we always used to do. You see, they used to think that if any one wuz to use the things or wear the clothes of a man what was dead, he'd be unlucky, as well as bein' follered by the mullo of the man what they belonged to."

"And do you think so, too?"

"I don't know as I'd keer to wear anythink what belonged to a dead girl."

"Would you if she had been dead a thousand years—more than a thousand years?"

She reflected. "Dead's dead, however long it is."

"But, Mary, you're walking on the dead all the time. The very earth underneath here is made of dead leaves and plants and dead animals. You have fed on dead things ever since you first stopped drinking your mother's milk, your dress is made of the skin of a dead sheep, your shoes——"

"What you do ta'k! Animals and leaves hasn't got mullos."

"Why shouldn't they have?"

"You do ta'k silly, sometimes. Who's ever dikked the mullo of a sheep or of a dog?"

"People have thought that they've seen phantom horses and dogs."

"And all sarts of other things, too, I dar say, when they'd a drop of tatti panni inside their skins. I've yeerd my uncle tell a tale of a man what were chased by a pack of hounds half through a night, and when the daylight come, and he run into Minstead churchyard with all of 'em arter him, their tongues hangin'

out and the slaver all drippin', they vanished as if they was smoke. But I warr'nt he'd a-spent a fine lot of money at the pub afore he yeerd them. I don't yold wi' drinkin' yourself silly. A man's no better than a fool when he's motto. Dad has his drop now and agen, but he don't drink like some of these mumpers. Travellers what has good Romany blood in 'em has too much sense. At a weddin' or at the races now and agen they takes their share of levina or tatti panni, but they gits motto and finishes with it; they don't keep on drinkin' and drinkin' themselves silly."

There was a look of scorn in her face.

"Do you know what I've been wishing?" he said suddenly. "To see what you would look like in some Egyptian ornaments that I have at home. There is a necklace of cornelian and blue glass, a head-dress of beaten gold, earrings——"

"Did they belong to that girl you said died thousands of years ago?"

"They did."

"Wheer did you get 'em?"

"I bought them. They were found in her tomb at Thebes five years ago."

"And they'd been on the carpse all that time?"

"Yes."

"Well, I wouldn't put 'em on if you was to pay me. Besides, if you was to goo up to Lunnon to get 'em, you'd be lelled. These red beads is good enough for me."

"They'd suit you," he said.

"Would you say as I was good-lookin'?"

"I should."

"Wait till you sees Em'ly," she said, with a touch

of wistfulness. "I'm ugly side of her. She goos and sits to artises in Barnemouth, and gits paid for it."

"Who's Em'ly?"

"My cousin up at Tharneyhill. Look, we be come to the Tharneyhill road now—it's right up theer across the moor on the hill, where all they hollies and firs is."

A peewit rose, crying peevishly, as they left the last field behind, and came out on to the stretch of boggy open country across which their road lay straight and white, dwindling away as it travelled into the distance. To the left a large stretch of bog water, a quarter of a mile away, shone like steel. Here and there a stunted fir rose in the waste of dead heather.

They crossed the railway bridge and pushed their way slowly along. Brown bog water tinkled and trickled by the roadside; coarse silver-green bog moss gleamed in patches between the tussocks, showing that a horse would be unwise to trust his weight to the treacherous surface; here and there was a stretch of sand washed bare and barren by the rains. Behind the travellers clouds had gathered, of fair-weather grey and white, with vistas of deep blue between. Torn and beautiful these clouds were, with livid shades and snowy lights, forming a moody architectural sky. Further west it was clearer, and only on the horizon cumuli were piled up in sun-adoring masses in the pale blue. The wind had risen in the south-west, with a tang of salt in it, and the freshness of unsullied miles.

"Who wuz right about the rain?" said Mary. "But it'll be wet to-morrow. It's soft weather for the time of year."

She walked along buoyantly. Inclined to slouch when she carried her basket, she had the grace of any wild creature, in spite of her ill-shod feet, when walking without a burden.

"How natural it feels to be tramping along like this," Lyddon thought. "How natural!" He found it easy to imagine that Mary was his sister, that he had led the life of the roads for years instead of for days, and that the Lyddon who had lived upon the rack in surroundings which he had hated, amongst people with whom he had had little in common, was the creature of dream, and the refugee tramp the reality. Mary had the gift of companionship. Her very crudeness and ignorance refreshed him, and stimulated his interest in her. Her innate honesty and common sense often made him feel small, even envious of her.

They were passing over a deep brown bog stream, and Mary left the road to run down the bank, bend down, scoop up some water into her hollowed hands, and drink it with a hissing intake of her breath. He wondered if she would take soup with similar audibility. Then he smiled; the thought of her in civilised surroundings was almost as barbarous as it would be to transplant her in person into the life where such things matter. Did they matter as much as Society would have us believe? Were the thousand-and-one restrictions which civilisation places upon a man of good breeding as vital as popular prejudice makes them? In the Sahara it is impolite not to drink up one's coffee with a noise, or to belch over a good meal; in London it is unpardonable to do so. In Italy a man of breeding walks nearest the wall when with a lady; in England on the kerb. He thought of a man who founded a Mustard and Mutton Society,

at the dinners of which a man could have mint-sauce with beef if he desired it, or eat asparagus with a spoon and fork. These were to be the outward and visible signs of inward and invisible freedom of spirit—not that he had ever remarked that the members of the society were more enlightened than their fellow-creatures. Their eccentricities were self-conscious. But then to be a member of a society is to kill spontaneity. To be spontaneously enthusiastic or even eccentric is excusable; to be eccentric or enthusiastic in a body controlled by a code of rules is damnable. Religions as well as crazes have been killed by the society-forming instinct.

They went slowly up the half-mile of hill at the end of their journey. The donkey seemed to doze as he walked; Mary was uncommunicative. At the summit, by a gravel pit, some forest ponies were grazing, shaggy and unkempt. One mother, red-brown as the dead bracken, had a foal with her which nosed for milk, and whinnied inquisitively with lifted nostrils at the approach of the donkey-cart. The ponies moved off gently in a body down the valley. As the travellers reached the brow of the hill, a labourer in a cart appeared over it. His face was dark and un-English; he wore earrings in his ears. He greeted Mary and stared at Lyddon.

"That's one of the Pidgeleys," said she when he had passed. "He've a-quit travellin' and took a cottage up yer. Married a cousin of mine."

"You all seem to be related," Lyddon commented.

“ Well, you see, they isn’t so many of us travellers, after all, is there? And we marries amongst ourselves, that’s where ’tis, look.”

“When will you marry?” he asked, looking straight into her pretty eyes.

"I dunno," she replied, gazing away from him. "There's a man as wants me now. I says I'll never marry, but I specks I shall do like the rest of 'em."

"You're not in love with the man, then?"

"He's awright," she said indifferently. "But I don't know as I shall marry he. Anyways, I'm not a-goin' to for a long time yet. We was took together at Lyndhurst Fair."

"Took?"

"Photygraphed. There's a man goes round with a photygraphin' machine and does you while you waits. Sixpence. I got it in a box in the cart. I'll show you."

She went to the back of the cart, and took from a corner of it a dirty cigar-box tied up with string. Inside was a collection of valued objects: a silver brooch, a "lucky stone," a grimy letter or two, and sundry other odds and ends. She held the lid in her teeth, and selected from the heterogeneous set of treasures a photograph of the shiny description which one sees in the windows of cheap photographers in the East End.

"Yer!" she said, and gave it to him.

He saw a girl who was chiefly mouth, two deep shadows running from nose to chin. He only saw a faint resemblance in this grinning young woman to Mary. The man was an unlicked lout of a youth, with a smooth and greasy curl over his forehead and a commonplace, cunning expression.

"What's his name?" asked Lyddon.

"Alf."

Lyddon guessed as much from the young man's appearance.

"Alf what?"

"Alf Stace. He belongs yerabouts, but I met him up hoppin'. His dad's got steam-horses, and he boxen—what you calls a 'pug.' He likes travellin' all about."

"Is he a cousin?"

"No; he don't come of a travellin' family. His mother and father took to the roads because they liked it."

"But——" he began, then checked himself. It seemed nothing short of revolting to him to think that Mary, with her savage purity, her peculiar charm, should ever be the mother of this egregious creature's children. There was something rare and fine about her that made such a possibility abhorrent, unthinkable.

They had turned off the main road on to a track, and the cart was bumping over the soft ruts.

"Well," said she, "what d'you think of it?"

"It's abominable of you—a libel."

She let her thoughtful eyes rest on his. "Am I prettier then that?"

"Much better looking. As for the young man you think of marrying—I don't like him."

"Ain't he good enough for you?" she asked in a somewhat hostile voice.

"He's not good enough for you, in my opinion. And what's more, you know it."

"Why's he not good enough? You never spoke to him."

"I don't like his eyes. They are too close together. The mouth is loose, cruel, weak."

"Well, you don't like me in the picter neither, so we're a pair."

"What's wrong with you there is grin and bad light-

ing. You're worse than an actress on a picture post-card—all teeth."

"I wuz happy that day," she said wistfully. "I enj'yed myself."

"With the young man—Alf?"

"No, not ezackly. But there's some days when you feels happy and don't know why. I had a real good time. Em'ly and lots of the other gals was there. Lordy, how we laughed! In the evenin' we all got singin' and dancin'. I could have danced for three days and nights without stoppin'."

"With Alf?"

"With anybody with a pair of legs to them, or without, for that matter. I dances step-dances to meself. Once a lady who seen me dance asked dad to let me goo up to Lunnon an' dance on the stage. 'Twas for a society, look, a sort of place where they gets folks to dance old dances what people don't dance nowadays like they useter. But dad wouldn't let me goo."

"I think he was right. Were you sorry?"

"No. I didn't want to dance afore a lot like that. I'd be ashamed. I'd want to run."

"Well, life with Alf Stace won't be all fairs and dancing."

"Course not."

"And he'll beat you sometimes."

"Not he. I wouldn't be beat by the likes of he."

"Who would you be beaten by?"

Her face assumed a blank look.

"If I wuz fond of my mush, look——" she said hesitatingly. "There's two kinds of lovin', you see. You loves a man out of kindness because he'd do most anything for you—or you loves him because

you can't help it, even if he's done nothin' for you."

"And which way would you rather love? "

"I don't want none of that yet," said she. "We gals has the best of it. I ain't goin' to marry this year, nor the next neither if I can help it."

CHAPTER IX

LYDDON found that "in the hollies" at Thorneyhill was more than a mere expression. High and wind-blown as this gypsy village was, open to the moor on all four sides, the thicket of hollies which grew to the north of it had become an irregular labyrinth of thick bushes as close and impenetrable as yew hedges, in the midst of which a man might sleep in a gale and hardly be aware of it. In winter and summer these close-growing ramparts of dark green afforded shelter to a changing population of human creatures.

Unless a man were acquainted with the gypsy art of knowing one bush or path from another, as a shepherd knows one sheep from another, he might easily lose his way for a short time in the confusing maze of thick green bushes. To a person living in intimacy with Nature, however, no tree or bush is merely a tree or bush. Each has a separate individuality, a different contour, a distinctive appearance. It would be almost impossible for a gypsy to walk twice over the same ground in unfamiliar country without recognising it, even if the country were as bare as a prairie. He unconsciously notes a hundred landmarks of the most trivial description that would escape the observation of a person bred to a town life.

The hollies were more than a housing and shelter, however. At Christmas-time they furnished a means of livelihood, and the flower-sellers busied themselves with making wreaths and bunches of red-berried holly for sale when they went on their rounds in Christchurch and Bournemouth.

Lyddon rigged up a tent in a little blind alley, a snug wind-protected corner of the labyrinth. He set it up as he had seen the gypsies—driving in the stakes, spreading the straw and old carpet, fitting the “ranyors” into roughly cut sockets in the ridge pole, and pinning the brown blankets together.

She concerned herself with the fire, for which she took a sack of wood from the cart.

“You light the fire,” she commanded. “I’m off to get two-penn’orth of bread up at the shop and a penn’orth of cheese, and to stop at Aunt Matilda’s and tell her we’ve a-come. Then I’ll come back.”

The fire proved very refractory, and Lyddon almost exhausted their slender supply of matches until he remembered that a piece of dead furze was as inflammable as tinder. But it blazed up and died out before the sticks were well alight, and he went in search of more—missing his way in the hollies as he came back laden, and running into another camp and into several impasses before he found his own retreat. By that time the fire was dead and black. He used the last remaining match, kept feeding the fire with pieces of dead furze, and at length got it well alight, just as Mary reappeared twenty minutes after her departure. He told her of his vicissitudes and she laughed.

“If I’d a-bin here, I lay I’d a-had it burning in less than a minute, damp wood or no damp wood. Wood’s always damp this time of year, but I don’t pay no heed to that. Yer! I got somethin’ good for ’ee!”

Her amber-brown eyes gleamed with merriment and she held something concealed under her torn apron.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Guess, then."

"It can't be the bread and cheese—the newspaper parcel under your arm's that."

She lifted the apron with a dramatic gesture and discovered a jug of beer.

"I went into Aunt Matilda's on the way and she give me the bread and cheese, so I got a drop of levina up there in the village."

They sat down to their meal with great zest, and devoured great junks of good home-baked bread: even the cheap soapy cheese did not taste amiss. They passed the jug from one to another, and Lyddon, who had always been ultra-fastidious, forgot to wonder which side of it Mary's lips had touched. But then they were very attractively curved, the lips of health itself.

Then she wiped them on her sleeve, rolled cigarettes for herself and him, lit them from a stick, and sat back hugging her knees, her thin comely face glowing from the heat of the fire, the ale, and the fresh air.

"And to-night," said Lyddon, "you'll be sleeping in a house."

"Not me," she said. "I shall put up a bit of a tent back of aunt's house. I don't keer for sleepin' in a room, beside they'se crowded in theer as it is. Prissy's married, but now the other two gals has a room to themselves."

"Is your Aunt Matilda your father's sister?"

"No, she wasn't a James. She was my mother's sister, look. Granny lives theer, too. Bed-ridden. But she've a-lost her mind lately, poor old 'ooman. Her name's Lamb, Amelia Lamb. They's granny and Aunt Matilda, and Em'ly, and Vi'let, and Allus,

and the two boys left, beside Uncle Joe. And there's on'y three rooms for the lot of 'em."

"How on earth do they manage?" he asked, watching her face.

"Well, Em'ly and Vi'let sleeps by themselves in a kind of loft place, and the boys sleeps long of Aunt and Uncle, and Allus sleeps long of Granny. Afore Prissy married she slept with Granny, too. When she was married, she married a young man name of James, a cousin of dad's, and they set up in the garden back of aunt's house in a tent. The night after the weddin' Prissy goes up to granny and swears nothin' 'd make her goo down to the tent. 'I'm goin' to sleep along o' granny,' she says. But they got her out into the garden and locked the door on her, and young James he carried her down to the tent hisself."

"It was a marriage by capture. Why, was she afraid of her husband?"

"Got kind of shy. Gals is like that sometimes."

"Is Prissy pretty, too?"

"She wuz. She's got four chavis by now, and that's made her thin. But she wuz never so pretty as Em'ly. Pris has got a cottage now, up over the hill, when we goo up to aunt's you'll see it. Well, I got to leave you now you're settled, but I'll come over afore supper-time and bring you a bit of summat. Here's half a loaf, and the tea and tea-pot's in there in the tent. If you wants anything, aunt's house is just acrost from here, with a bit of green in front of it. You can't miss it, it's the on'y cottage this side."

"I shall miss you horribly."

She flushed, suddenly and unexpectedly. "When you wants me you've on'y got to goo outside of aunt's and holler me."

"What are you going to do this afternoon?"

“Cut some pegs and help aunt dig up some primrose roots.”

“Well, if you were miles away digging up primroses I should holler in vain.”

“You got to goo and git some sticks. I’ve took the donkey up to aunt’s, but if you wants anything out of the cart, it’ll be in the shed beside the cottage. Yer, I must goo.”

She rose, as if half-reluctantly, and dropped the end of the cigarette into the flames, holding her brown silver-ringed hands a moment to the blaze, though in the shelter it was not cold.

“Good-bye, Mary dear.”

“Good-bye, Adam. You needn’t mind leaving the tent. I knaws the people what’s camped near by, and I’ll drop a lav to one of the chavis to kip an eye on the fire.”

Her comely figure and dark head disappeared behind the thick hollies, and he was left with a feeling of abruptly ruptured companionship. A wave of sudden desire passed over him. He was possessed by the impulse for a minute to leap after her through the hollies, to seize her arms and bring her back, willy-nilly, with her sweet wide smile and her brown smoky hands.

“And what then?” he asked himself, and with a flush as deep as her own had been he told himself he was several different kinds of fool. But her half-smoked cigarette had fallen short of the fire, and he took it up and placed it between his own lips, wondering if it were an instinct of flight as sudden as his instinct of pursuit which had made her throw it away before she had finished it and leave him. There is never any pressing hurry in a gypsy’s life—her aunt would probably wait placidly enough until she

appeared. Then he turned the subject out of his mind deliberately. Mary was but a child, in spite of her would-be lover, and gulfs deeper than the ocean and wider than the sky separated them. To cross them, even for a moment, would be to spoil their relationship one to another. Mary was lovable, Mary had an insidious charm which was something very difficult to define, and beneath her crudeness she had something like a soul. Well, it was no business of his. Sooner or later she would pass between the millstones; the experiences of married life with an Alf Stace, or one like unto him, would grind the youth and the poetry out of her; and the savage fight for existence, the sordid struggle for bread for herself and her children, would coarsen her and rob her of her gentleness and her capacity for happiness.

A chirping note, sharp, staccato and metallic, repeated again and again, and a great fluttering of wings attracted his attention at last. He perceived a chaffinch with ruddy breast and flirting tail engaged in a love passage with its mate in the holly-bush just above his head. He saw the pursuit of the cock-bird, the mock flight, the provocative coquetry of the hen, and because he was so motionless they took no heed but continued their pretty courtship. High against the windy blue and white of the sky above him a lark was shrilling, his wings beating the air so rapidly that they looked like pinions of mist, rising by short ecstatic jerks and then sinking to earth in the sudden silence that follows supreme effort. Somewhere on the moor he had a nest, somewhere he had known the ecstasy of which he sang so brazenly, somewhere he had tasted the rapture of the spring. Lyddon felt curiously lonely.

He had to walk far afield to collect his wood, and

returned at tea-time to find a ragged, touzle-headed urchin putting the last stick out of the sack into a dying fire.

"Mary ast me to kip up the fire," said he.

Lyddon remembered the twopence which the old stone-collector had given him two days before, and bestowed it upon the child, who lingered inquisitively.

"What's your name, sonny?" asked Lyddon, feeding the fire with the fresh supply of wood and setting the kettle on the "kavvi-kosht" over it.

"Robert," said the boy readily.

"Robert what?"

"Robert Sherratt."

"Where are you camping?"

"Back of yer." He indicated with a dirty hand the thicknesses of holly.

"Did you fill the kettle?"

"No, Mary did. She come back yer after you'd a-gone. She said I was to tell you there's a well in her aunt's garden what you kin use if you wants."

"Is Mary a cousin of yours?"

"No."

The grimy elf with his old-young face sat down on his heels by the blaze, chewing a stick.

"Where d'you come from?" he questioned in his turn.

"London," said Lyddon.

The boy grinned. "I bin there onst," he said.

"Did you like it?"

"We went to a Pictor Pallis," said he, as if this were the sum total of all joys. "Got a fag?" he added shamelessly.

"No. You can have some tea though, when the kettle's boiled."

It did boil at last, and Lyddon made the tea, finding that Mary had left him two cups in the corner of the tent. Did this mean that she contemplated joining him?

The boy and man ate and drank in silence, till the child said—

"Mother 've got a baby."

"How old?"

"Barn yestiddy. So they can't move us on for a fortnight."

"How many of you are there?"

"Thirteen. Mother 've had fifteen, but two on 'em's dead."

"And how many tents have you got?"

"We ain't got but the one. A double one, look. Mother and father sleeps one side and us little ones the tother."

"But how do you manage?"

"Oh, we gits in some'ow. Kips each other warm."

Lyddon asked how his parents made enough to provide for them all.

"All sarts of ways. Father makes bee-pots and mother sells lace. Sometimes father works for the farmers, they'se glad of a little extry help in gettin' in the crops or cartin' hay, it has to be done quick, look."

The boy devoured his bread-and-butter hungrily, Lyddon could see that he was thin and ill-nourished. And yet when he compared the life these miserable wanderers led with the life they would lead in a slum, he found it infinitely preferable to leave them where they were. Here, at any rate, they had pure air, wholesome sunlight, the lore of the woods and moors,

and parents who worked too hard for their precarious living to indulge in frequent drinking bouts.

Later on he accompanied the child to the tent. The man was working at some bee-pots which he said were ordered by the shop at Burley. His materials were of the simplest—brambles, split and peeled, and the tall bleached bennets which grow in fir woods. The woman, moved by curiosity, drew the tent covering aside and looked out at Lyddon, who bade her good-day, and asked her how she did.

“She’ll be up soon,” said the man. “There’s not much amiss with her. She haves ’em very easy.”

Half-a-dozen filthy children were playing in the mud. One boy of about three years old stood by the tent and put his tongue out at Lyddon, doing a kind of shuffling straddle-legged dance in the muddy straw, out of sheer impudence. His fair curls were very dirty-looking, his face was begrimed, his nose running. Yet he looked the picture of health, and the woman, in spite of her fifteen children and her fifty years of wandering, had not a grey hair in her head.

“Any time you wants to go away,” said the man, “you come yer, and Robert or one of the others ’ll see yer things isn’t touched.”

Lyddon thanked him and was conscious of their curiosity. They knew that he was not one of themselves, and they also knew, evidently, that he was penniless, for they did not ask him for money.

He returned to the lonely tent and sat restlessly by the fire. The programme which Mary had sketched out for him—to start off on the roads as soon as the leaves were out, pleased him, but it was a long way off. Twilight had fallen, and the wind echoed and rustled in the hollies, accentuating, as did every small sound, the silence, the absence of human voices in the

tent. In vain he tried to think of other things, in vain he read and re-read the sheet of the *Daily Mail* in which the loaf of bread had been wrapped; all he could think of was the fact that very soon Mary would bring his supper, and that she might perhaps sit with him a little while in the firelight and talk, and smoke, and smile. He had always fled from people in the days when he had been obliged to meet his wife's friends in the artificial life she preferred to any other. But now he was possessed by an absurd hunger for the sight of Mary's thin vivid face, with its gentle, smiling eyes; the mouth that curved upwards wistfully at the corners, and its shadowy untidy frame of plaited hair. The impenetrable hollies shut him in as in a prison of dark green. He would have blessed even Aunt Gerania's brown and wrinkled countenance if it had appeared round the corner of the bushes, but by this time her van was drawn up for the night on some roadside or in some field between here and Parkestone.

There was a light noise, a crackling, a rustling. It must be Mary with his supper. No, it moved too irregularly, too loiteringly. He went to the opening to look. Coming down the narrow green-walled path in the light of the rising moon was a donkey-foal, a small, grey, shaggy creature, whose velvet nose sought delicately among the holly leaves and prickles, for young bramble leaves which it plucked with a lifting of its lips and a gentle tug. At the sight of Lyddon it walked leisurely back to its invisible dam. Lyddon sat down again to wait. A renewed rustling, a footfall, a broken stick—something human was coming at last! There was the gleam of an apron, and then—into the circle of the firelight a little girl bearing a plate carefully covered with another.

She came to the tent.

"I'm Allus," she said. "Yer's some stew for you, and is there anythink else you wants, please, Mary says."

There was nothing but Mary herself. He thanked the little maiden who looked at him with brown eyes round with interest.

"No, I 'ad some," she said when he thanked her and offered her some of the savoury mess.

"You are like Mary," he said, looking into the child's face, for she was dark and pretty and clean.

"She's me cousin, look," said Alice, and relapsed into silence, devouring him with a comprehensive stare which took note of every detail. She watched him eat and refused to be drawn into conversation, answering only "Yes" or "No" to all his efforts.

Only after he had finished, she volunteered—

"I can jump."

He was somewhat nonplussed.

"Jump, can you?"

She nodded. "I can jump higher nor any one in Tharneyhill."

"That's something to be proud of."

"Like to see me?" she asked.

"Of course."

"Well, you hold out one of they sticks. Hold it a bit low at fust, an' you see."

He held it as high as his knee.

"That's nuthink," she exclaimed scornfully. "Higher!"

He moved the stick up as far as his thigh.

"That'll do to start with," she approved, and leapt it lightly and easily, though her boots were clumsy.

He held it higher. She cleared it. As high as his

waist, almost up to his shoulder. The little creature was over, her heels just clicking against the stick. Then she desisted, red-faced, panting and smiling, while he applauded.

"Mary said I could show you, if you ast me," said she naïvely.

"What has Mary been doing?"

"Out with mother. Where you bin?"

He described to her his walk in search of wood.

"Oh, you bin down Holmesley. There's lots of wood 'bout now—they big winds brings down the sticks."

They conversed a little and then she remarked—"I must goo now."

"It's not late."

"We goes to bed early. Oh, I most forgot! Uncle Sam sent word by Tom Pidgeley that you was to goo up to Miss Price's to-morrer about seven o'clock and see Mr. Brushwood up there, what's putting up a place for her. His man what does the carpentering 've fallen sick, an' uncle spoke for you yestiddy when he seen Mr. Brushwood down at Burley. So if you goes up, you may get the job. It's up on the main road—any one 'll tell you where Miss Price do live. There's another carpenter at Tharneyhill, but a lot of 'em's working up at Lord Redfield's, and he'd a-have to get a man from Christchurch."

"I'll go," said Lyddon, after a pause.

"Mary says, mind you does," said Alice.

"You're fond of Mary?"

"She's awright," Alice replied in a tone that might have been Mary's own.

"I tell you what—if I do get the job, I'll get a big cake at the village shop the first time I get my wages, and we'll have a tea-party."

She received the proposition coolly. "It'll have to be a big un," she observed, "if we all comes."

"Two, then, if the funds run to it."

"You should see what we gets through at a Sunday School treat," said she fervently.

"You go to Sunday School?"

"Course. What d'you think! They gives us a tree at Christmas. But I mustn't stay yer talkin'."

She prepared to take her leave.

"Good-night, then," said he.

"Good-night. Mind you don't oversleep yerself. Shall I come and holler you in the mornin'?"

"There's no need to do that. I wake early."

He did not offer to escort her back, and she disappeared into the darkness as silently as a wild animal.

He sat awhile by the embers of the fire, and then, as it grew chilly, undressed by its dying glow and lay down to sleep.

CHAPTER X

THE house in which Miss Price lived was upon the highest shoulder of the hill. She had chosen it because of its pure air and its view over Hampshire and Dorset, for she could see the Isle of Purbeck and Four Barrow Down with Poole Harbour glittering between on any clear day, and even the Isle of Wight, as well as miles of heath and forest. The view was her delight and pride, she thought it the finest in the county. She loathed two products of the times more than anything else on God's earth: one was the motor-car and the other the jerry builder. Neither troubled her much at Cloudy Gate, which was the name of her house. In the summer, it is true, excursion brakes from Bournemouth and the motor-cars of pleasure-seekers passed the house and reduced her to impotent rage, but the length of a front garden separated her from the monstrosities, and from her top windows she had outlook over as big a stretch of wild country as any to be found in the southern counties—almost houseless, as she put it. To hear her talk, though she was the kindest of souls, you would imagine that Miss Price wished to deprive all human beings but herself of habitations. Cottages she pardoned, provided they were mud-built and thatched, but the red-brick erections of the commercial builder were to her a crime, a desecration. Mr. Brushwood, being a builder, was looked upon by her with deep suspicion and as much resentment as she could harbour against any one whom she really knew, for he was responsible for a row of red-brick, slate-roofed

buildings in the village. Nevertheless she had commissioned him to build a new coach-house and stable in her garden, the old stabling quarters being dilapidated and ruined. She had, therefore, made truce with the enemy, having need of him, but preserved a genial hostility in speaking to him.

"The old gal'll come and talk to you as like as not while you're working," said Brushwood to Lyddon, after he had agreed to give him a trial. "Don't you mind what she says. Always givin' advice, she is. You just say, 'Yes, 'm,' and do what you likes about it."

Lyddon was to use the other man's tools, and he set to work cheerfully. To work with his hands was natural to him, after his apprenticeship. All passed off well. Brushwood, who was his own foreman, commended him grudgingly and gave him to understand that he could come again on the morrow. Lyddon discovered that he had forgotten to bring his luncheon with him, and as he felt disinclined to go back and hunt up food in his tent, he decided to wait with an empty stomach till six o'clock. But at half-past four, as he was planing some boards, a small and neat-figured old woman came out to him. She wore a black skirt and grey blouse, with an ancient rush hat that a tramp would have discarded.

"Are you Brushwood's new man?"

"Yes, 'm," replied Lyddon, with a smile flickering into the eyes which he kept downcast.

She looked at him sharply.

"You were working in your lunch-hour," she said accusingly, turning bright, grey eyes upon him.

He felt like a school-boy detected in a misdemeanour, and stuttered an explanation.

"Well, you'd better go into the kitchen now and have

a cup of tea," said she, cutting him short. "I always give workmen about the place their tea, as I suppose you may have heard."

"Yes, 'm," Lyddon got out, though it was untrue.

But she still lingered.

"You are a stranger to these parts."

"Yes, 'm."

"And an educated man, are you not?"

Lyddon replied that he could read and write.

She snapped him up impatiently. "Nonsense, you were at a public school—you can't deceive me. What was it, drink? You are young to have knuckled under."

"Yes, 'm." His head was raised now, and he tried to assume the proper tone of humility.

"Don't answer like a parrot," said she. "I want to warn you not to drink while you're here. There's nothing like a good meal to keep you from that temptation, and while you are working on my premises you'll go into the kitchen and eat a good square meal at mid-day, and a good tea, too; do you understand? I don't want to run any risks. You are in the purest air in Hampshire—and we've the finest view; don't spoil the one by beery breath, or the other by the spectacle of a man who's made a hog of himself. Are you in want of money?"

"No, 'm."

"If you are—or if you are in trouble, you need not fear to speak out to me. I am an old woman, and I've heard a good deal of trouble in my time. Had some, too. You couldn't shock me if you were to try. Think that over, and go in to tea."

He went in, somewhat bewildered, and considerably ashamed of himself for deceiving so likeable an old woman.

A silent, elderly maid, who wore no cap, took his advent as a matter of course, and placed a large cup of tea, a plate of ham and a loaf of bread before him. He ate enough for two, he had not known how hungry he was until he started, neither had he tasted such food for a long time.

When he stopped work at six he was tired. The long physical exertion, coming on top of his illness as it did, had exhausted him, mind and body. Heavy rain had fallen during the day, and a fine drizzle was falling as he put his tools together, walked down the main road, turned off towards the post-office and school, and then struck off across a strip of Forest to the hollies. He had left word with the Sherratts not to keep the fire burning, and he did not relish the prospect of returning to the cheerlessness of a chilly tent this wet evening. The ground was already muddy, his boots left the track with a sucking sound, water was standing on the paths, and there was a constant and depressing dripping as he made his way through the holly bushes. The familiar smell of wood-smoke reached him; from the Sherratts' camp, he reflected with envy. But when he turned the corner of the bushes which led to his own retreat, he saw that the smoke, beaten down by the damp gusts and wreathing in blue rings through the holly which rose above it, was issuing from his own tent. But the tent was silent as a tomb.

He stooped and looked in, and saw Mary fast asleep on the sacking and carpet by the fire, her dark head against a bundle, her arms flung abroad and limp, her attitude relaxed, her muddy boots obstructing the entrance. He stepped over them, and sat himself in the opposite half of the tent, fearful of waking her. Poor child, she lay there in the utter abandon of

fatigue. Her battered hat was pushed aside, her cotton blouse was open, showing her brown neck and the red beads around it. He watched with interest a pulse that moved softly and regularly in her throat, and the gold earring that gleamed beneath her untidy dark hair. She sighed and stirred, he held himself mute. Then an acorn or something else exploded in the fire with a report like that of a gun. She stirred again, and this time opened her eyes sleepily.

"I bin asleep!" she exclaimed in surprise, sitting up with a jerk and feeling for her hat. "Why didn't you wake me?"

"It would have been a shame!"

"I don't know why. I came over sleepy while I was waiting for you. I always feels that way after a day's hawkin'. I bin to see how you was gettin' on. An' I got you a bit of meat in Bournesmouth for your supper; it's there in the kavvi."

"You've been to Bournemouth!" he cried, surprised.

"Yes. 'Tis the day aunt and the gals goes in to sell flowers."

"But it's thirteen or fourteen miles away."

"We on'y walks as fur as Christchurch—that's eight miles, and then we takes the tram to Bournesmouth. Aunt haves her reg'lar customers round Boscombe way, and after we've got the fresh flowers at the market, we walks around, an' I sells my pegs where I can, and then we walks back."

"Even then you must have walked quite twenty miles."

She lifted the lid of the pot to take a look at the meat inside.

"I dar say. We'se used to it, look. We was off

before five this marning, or I'd 've come to see what you was doin'. I kep' on a-wonderin' all day how you was gettin' on up at Price's. Have they took you on?"

"Yes." He had lost interest in his own affairs, touched and ashamed because the girl had troubled, at the end of so long a day, to come to his tent to see after his comfort.

"How much are they givin' you?"

"Fifteen shillings a week."

"That's half what they gives the other man, I'll lay."

"It'll more than keep me. I'll hand over a substantial sum to you soon," he said. "If I'm to be treated as one of the family, I shall contribute to the family purse."

"You leave that alone," she said gruffly. "What you has you'se welcome to. You ain't eat much to-day though; there's that half loaf I sent down not cut into."

He told her of Miss Price's hospitality.

"She's a funny old gal," said Mary. "Worth more than all the other Gaujis round here put together. She's very fond of Aunt Matilda and Uncle Joseph, and she gives he a job when she can in the garden. She's kind of cracked about Romany chavis, and she've a-quarrelled at the keepers about some of our folks, one time and 'nother. She thinks the world of aunt. She've a-offered to fit out Allus for service and find her a place."

Lyddon remembered the colt-like young creature who had leapt over the stick for him, and doubted Miss Price's wisdom in this.

"Got a van, too, she have," continued Mary, taking the pot off the fire. "Bought it off a man called

White, what lives in Christchurch. He's a reg'lar Romany, he is, but he lives in a cottage now. 'Twas an old van, an' she do use it to have tea in now and agen. Don't travel in it, though there's lot of gentle-folk what does that now, in the summer. Where you put the plates? I ain't had my supper yet, I allowed I'd have it with you."

"I hoped you would last night," said he, receiving his portion.

"I had it with aunt," said she stolidly.

"The tent felt very empty without you."

"Did you want me?" she asked, reddening, without looking up from her operations at the pot.

"I think I did."

"If it didn't go no further than thinkin'——"

"Well, I wanted you—badly," he said in lower tones.

"I'm here now," she said, in a somewhat muted voice, passing him his plate without looking at him. "You see—here they all knows aunt—and me—and they might get talkin'—'sif you and me was behavin' as we shouldn't. They mumpers lives any'ow, but our lot've always——"

There was a small silence.

Then he smiled angrily across the fire. "There's not much difference between your people and any other people, after all, when it comes to gossip."

"No, they always talks."

"Well, my dear child, we'd best not give them cause. You mustn't come to the tent. I shall have to see you now and again."

She lifted her lowered head with a quick movement like that of a pony.

"I don't care what they says," she exclaimed with sudden defiance. "There's no harm in lookin'

in, and why should we heed what ain't true anyways?"

He stirred the fire with vague irritation, vague hostility towards the outside world. He shut his ears to the warning prick of his conscience. If he cut loose from Mary now, that delightful setting off with her in the leaf-time would have to be put aside. He mentally pooh-poohed his own misgiving. He tried to forget the moment of alarm last night when his pulses had throbbed the quicker on her account.

"I believe you're right," he said. "I expect they don't realise what a middle-aged married man you have been charitable to. And, after all, you're a child."

She knitted her brows at that. "No, I ain't," she said. "Prissy wasn't no older than me when she got married."

"Is that the cousin who ran away from her husband on her wedding night?" he asked absently.

"Yes, that's the one. Besides, you wants a girl to come and clean for you, and wash out your shirts, and that."

"I could do it myself."

"Not so well as me. And if you give me the money to get what you wants, look, I could always cook your bit of supper."

"I'll hand over all I earn to you, if you keep me in food and 'baccy."

Thus, mutually, the matter was settled.

"I was silly to tell you 'bout the folks talkin'," she said after a while. "You see my aunt, she don't like Aunt Gerany much, they quarrels whenever they gets together, and some travellers told her there was a man livin' with us up at the Bushes, and that he was after me. So aunt kep' me from comin' last night——"

"I shall come and see this aunt," he said grimly.

"Don't you tell her I told you. She doesn't know that you're a gennleman, look, and not a traveller. I told her you was married, but I was afraid to tell her you was a gennleman, for fear there'd be talk, and the police would get on to you."

He understood that she had sheltered him at her own expense.

"I'll see her and tell her I'm an artist."

Her brow cleared. "Yes, maybe she'd believe that."

"She must be made a friend of mine," said he. "I don't want to lose you like that. Think of to-night, if it hadn't been for you, I should have come to a dead fire, a damp, lonely tent——"

"And instead you finds a lumpin' girt rakli sleepin' by the yog," said she, with one of her sweetest, most brilliant smiles.

"And a supper," he added prosaically.

"It's a martel good supper, too," said she, ladling it out on to two plates. Then they fell to, and when a bone proved inconvenient, she nibbled it. He watched her, and she put down the bone with a smile.

"There's some boncs that's ak'erd," said she, half apologetically. "It do sim a pity to let the sweetest meat goo, though. I knows gentlefolks on'y uses their knives and farks, but they doesn't care what they wastes. Why, a girl in service told me that what they throws away in a wik 'ud keep a fam'ly like the Sherratts yer a month. They don't do nothin' to arn what they eats, look—that's where 'tis, and so they don't knaw the value of it."

"I expect Adam and Eve ate that way," he said. "With their fingers, I mean."

"Well, you're Adam and I'm Eve, so there you

are, look. I wonder where they picked their sticks to make their bits of yog with in that there Garden! There ain't much wood lyin' 'bout in most gardens, they'se too tidy. I don't suppose they two had a house, d'you? They lived out-o'-doors, like you an' me. You might say they was Romany chals, now mightn't you? with no gavmushes or keepers to tarn 'em out. But in the end they was moved on—'cos they got stealin'."

"And Romany chals have never been known to take what isn't theirs, have they?" he said half maliciously.

"What does it matter—thieves or no thieves, we'se treated like as if we was. Yes, they was the first gypsy folk, sure enough, in a way of speakin'. All they Bible folk was in the beginning. They lived in tents, and shifted about like what we does. Then they took to houses. But we ain't done that yet—not most of us; nor never will, I hopes."

"Where did you learn so much Bible history?"

"Up at school. And I has a Bible what granny used to dooker with—dad's mammy, not the old gal up yer."

"Dooker with a Bible! How did she do that?"

"I dunno," said she. "We little uns was all afraid of she. She was deligious, look, as Aunt Gerany a-told you, but if she wanted to curse you, she could curse you in a way's other folks 'ud tremble to yer, because she'd all them Bible texes pat in 'er mouth. There was a bit she'd a-say backwards over one keeper what was a hard man and sarved us bad, and sure enough, he never knew what luck was from that day on. And she enj'yed frightenin' folk now and agen with her queer ways. Once, when I was a bit of a thing and the others was all little too, she and mother and

dad and all of us was up ag'in Portsmouth. There was a mulleni castle there."

"A what?—oh, a haunted castle. Yes, go on."

"A mulleni castle," she repeated in a hushed voice, glancing for an instant at the growing dusk and the silent hollies outside. The wind rustled, and the sticks in the fire cracked and spat in the flames. "Well, 'twas gettin' late, and we little ones was cryin' for want of sleep and a bit of somethin' to put in our bellies, and we didn't know where to atch for the night. There was nowhere on the road where we could atch, because if we'd a-put up by the side of the road the gavmushes'd a-come arter us. We was tired, as I've a-said, and the night had come. So mother says, mullos or no mullos she'd atch where we was, up ag'in the castle."

"How did she know it was haunted? "

"Every one knawed that. Folks had dikked the mullos. A giant useter to live there years agoo, and was killed there—a giant."

"I never heard of such a castle."

"I lay there's some things yet as you haven't heerd of."

"I hope there are. Well? "

"There wasn't no help for it, and there we had to atch, and the boys they kep' on talking about the mullos. Mother she chukkered down the straw and the mattress and put in a couple of stakes and had up a shelter for us little ones in ha'f a minute, while dad took the horse out of the cart. And while they was busy, no one gave so much as a look at the old 'ooman. But she went to the poppas, and got a girt sheet and threw it auver her head, and jalled up to the girt gate what the giant used to come through out of the rumpken, and down she come towards us

in the dark. Then one of the boys give a scream and called to us to look, and some begun to cry and holler, and mother she sat as if she was frightened stiff. Dad stood there with the bucket in his hand, swearin'. 'Let it pass, let it pass!' says my mother, and we all pressed up ag'in the hedge more dead than alive, while granny was walking down without a word, the girt white sheet auver her. She got frightened herself at last, and off with the sheet, but 'twas past a joke, an' not a wink of sleep does we get that night, what with us children cryin' an' all. Dad would have given her what for, but he darsen't never say a word to she, look."

"She sounds a jolly unpleasant old woman," said Lyddon.

"She could be sweet as sugar when she wished. Many's the time she've made folks what was goin' to quarrel laugh fit to bust auver summat she'd a-say, funny-like. The gentlefolk used to come miles to ta'ak to she, and she never cared what she said to 'em."

"Which side of the family do you take after?" he inquired.

"I dunno. The granny I was telling you 'bout was a pretty gal when she was young—all the fellers was after her. But I'm not pretty like that."

"You're pretty enough."

"Think so, Adam?" said she, with a certain grave intensity. "I'd like you to think I was pretty."

"Why?" he asked, breaking a stick and putting it on the fire.

"I dunno. Because you knaws what's pretty—because I likes you to think I'm nice-lookin', though I ain't what you'se accustomed to. I wish me mouth wasn't so big. That's not like old Granny James.

She'd a nice mouth when she was young, so I've a-yeerd."

She sank into a kind of reverie, her knees drawn up in her favourite attitude, her face lit up by the spasmodic flame-light. Whatever her mouth was, it was sweet and provocative, Lyddon thought, as he glanced at her. There was something about the upturned corners that expressed for him Mary's peculiar charm, her smiling gentleness, her natural breeding and her "earthiness," as he called the vague, magnetic quality which so eluded his analysis.

"I must goo—look how dark it's got," said she, rising.

"But it's raining—hark!"

"I ain't afraid of a bit of wet."

She rose, and he got up too, and followed her into the wet grass and patch of furze brake just outside.

"You comin'?" she said, with a note of surprise.

"I'm going to see you through the hollies."

She made no motion of assent or dissent.

It was raining fast, and the paths, so narrow that they had to walk in single file, were almost pitch-dark. Mary went first.

"I'm glad you've a-come," said she stolidly. "Whenever I bin talkin' 'bout Granny James, I get a feelin' she's 'bout yer somewheres. And she might like to frighten folks still, if she was. I lay that's what some mullos sets out to do, and laughs to themselves when they see the live folk screamin' and shiverin'."

Just then she came to a sudden standstill, and uttered a muffled shriek. He caught her arms.

"What is it?"

"There's something touched me in the bushes," she muttered hoarsely.

There was indeed a rustling, a sound of parted foliage. In the shelter of his coat Lyddon struck a match, and for a second illuminated the dark alley with its tiny flame, which went out immediately. But it was alight long enough to elucidate the cause of alarm. A couple of yards in front, his grey hide soaked with rain, was the baby-donkey—hardly less scared than Mary herself. He threw up his heels scampishly, and trotted away in the mud.

"On'y a myla—after all," said Mary, with a trembling breath of relief. She let him take the front place without a murmur, and in a moment they had reached a broader path where they could walk side by side. She walked close to him as if by instinct, and slipped her smoky little hand into his arm. He took it in his, and stuck his fist into his pocket. So they walked along in silence but for the soggy noise their wet feet made in the fast-filling pools. And the little smoke-scented hand which he held in the dry shelter of his coat-pocket, was sweet to the touch.

CHAPTER XI

HE awoke to the familiar sound of falling rain and drumming water-drops, the steady patter against myriad leaves, the tinkle of drippings into gathering water near by. It was scarcely light and he lay where he was in the drowsy shelter of his blankets and the coat, which under treatment had achieved disreputability; and listened to the insistent downpour, thinking with the lazy vagueness characteristic of the hour.

Conscience holds slack reins over a man in the morning, and he let himself remember the smoky little hand which had sought shelter in his the night before. In imagination he was haunted by its warm little ghost, and by other ghosts, too—by the ghost of red beads lying like berries against a brown warm throat; by the ghost of the pulse that had beat in that same throat like the heart of a bird. No, Mary was wrong and her forefathers were right—things had ghosts as well as persons, for the ghost of the silver ring as he had felt it on her fingers as he held them was with him, too.

Lyddon had a certain simplicity of outlook that belongs to a man whom simple things attract most. He set himself to face the problem of Mary with a sincerity almost laughable.

Then he said solemnly and sleepily to himself: "You are to keep sentiment away. Such things are over for you once and for all. You will spoil everything and drive yourself back to facts you are trying to forget if you fool yourself for one instant."

In fact he was free as long as he was wise enough to keep his head, and if he couldn't keep that he was a fool indeed. He was not in love with Mary, nor had he the slightest intention of philandering with her. He was not a philanderer. In spite of an unhappy marriage he had never gone seriously out of his way for another woman—in fact, most women did not attract him at all. He was beginning to realise that Mary, half savage as she was, had something in her which did attract him, attracted him as inevitably as the lodestone attracts iron. He was not rash enough to try to find out in what the attraction consisted. Perhaps it was part of the vagabond instinct in him, the instinct which raised longing in him for open skies when he was beneath a roof, that made him love the society of trees more than the society of men, that put the desire for wandering into his long legs.

Full of morning philosophy, he lit his fire, dressed, and brewed his morning tea. The rain showed no intention of ceasing. Outside the skies were grey; hopeless and drenched, he left for work in a downpour. Miss Price called him in from the shed during the morning. She had an electric-bell installation, and something was wrong with it. Did he understand electric bells? (Did he, Richard Lyddon, understand electric bells!) He put it right and Miss Price hovered up about him, her eyes bright with curiosity. She was filled with pique that he had made no confidence in her. The broken-down gentleman, except in fiction, is usually lavish of confidences. Neither is he, as Lyddon was, unusually efficient.

"I saw Mary James's aunt, Matilda Jeff, this morning," she said to him, fixing her sharp kindly gaze upon him. "She tells me you've been camping with the Jameses."

"Yes, I have," said Lyddon, somewhat annoyed.

"Well, the Jameses are very nice people, and so are the Jeffs. Joseph Jeff, Mary's uncle, has worked for me for years."

To this Lyddon made no reply. He suspected that Matilda Jeff, Mary's aunt, had spoken to Miss Price, and felt annoyed.

"Matilda tells me you are an artist."

Lyddon turned on her. "I don't see that it matters to any one who I am, as long as my business doesn't interfere with theirs."

"That's just where you are wrong," said the old lady triumphantly. "It matters a lot, and I'll tell you why. I am glad to see you can get in a temper. It confirms me in my opinion of you."

Lyddon could not help smiling at this. "What is your opinion, then?"

"Well, you pose badly. The broken-down gentleman is in no respect like you. As a rule he's a helpless creature, and you are not. On the other hand you are obviously not a workman. Neither are you an escaped convict. There is nothing shifty about you or your eyes, and there is nothing criminal-looking about you. I thought at first it was drink, but I spoke after superficial judgment. Your hand is too steady."

"Well, Matilda Jeff told you I was an artist, didn't she?" said Lyddon, with a certain impatience as well as amusement.

"I'd stake my immortal soul you've never held a brush between your fingers. No—you couldn't."

"Really, Miss Price," said Lyddon, gazing at her steadfastly. "I don't see why you are so interested in me."

"Neither do I. Still the fact remains that you are

playing a part. A gentleman has no right to be living like a tramp, because it isn't fair on the tramps. I don't want the Jeffs upset. There is talk about you and Mary James. Now I don't know if you realise that Mary has a character to lose? Why, people like the Jameses and Jeffs are as particular about their women-kind as we are about ours. When the soldiers were camped near here, Joseph got his cart and drove his wife and daughters right away from the place. He knew he had a good-looking wife and pretty daughters, and he wasn't going to risk them."

"I don't see where this concerns me."

"You will in a minute. Mary is a very pretty girl. People say that you are dangling after her. I want you to know that so far she is a virtuous girl, too, and I don't want her head turned."

Lyddon flushed with sudden anger.

"I'm afraid I don't understand——"

"Don't let your temper master you. And go on working. Twisting that wire will relieve you. You can pretend it's my neck you are twisting off if you like."

But Lyddon still stood facing her.

"My dear man," said she soothingly, "don't take me for a gossip, or for one who revels in it. Perhaps you are not in the least attracted to Mary. Still if you spend all your time with her, and go up country with them, as Matilda Jeff says you mean to do, you'll bring talk upon the girl. I don't know if her parents were married in church. Many of the gypsies are not, still they troth themselves after their own fashion and have a strict code of morality. We had a fool of a writer down here last year, who was hunting up Romany. He certainly knew a foreign language, but he knew nothing of the nature of the people here. He looked

upon every camp and caravan as a possible vocabulary. Well, he made love to a girl here, one of the Christchurch Burtons. She got her head turned, and her lover, a man of her own class, was jilted. The writing creature went, and the girl is now shunned by every one. That bull in a china shop with his nose stuck out for copy was a member of a society for collecting gypsy lore. I hope you're not one of the same breed."

"Good Lord!" said Lyddon, "I never belonged to any society in my life except——" He checked himself, for he was a member of the Royal Society. "If I can't camp here without setting every tongue in the neighbourhood wagging," he went on, "it's a pity. Mary comes to help me now and again, but she is half my age. Also I am married and Mary knows it. Anyway, I've not the slightest intention of altering my plans to suit any busybody in the place."

"Now you are rude."

"I may be ruder if you say any more," he said politely.

"Come in and have your tea. We'll say no more about it. You see I am an old woman without any children to bother about, and I have a strain in me which makes me love these Forest hawkers. I've fought their battles for them many a time, and it makes me angry when people come to try to persuade them to give up their perfectly healthy form of life, or to pump progress into them, or to make them self-conscious. I love them because they are a living embodiment of conservatism. They haven't changed in their habits because one fool invented School Boards and another wireless telegraphy."

Lyddon found himself forgiving her.

So the days went on. It rained without ceasing. Lyddon was obliged to move his tent to higher ground, as the site he had originally chosen became sodden. One day the rain changed into sleet, and the next morning an inch of snow lay on the ground. Lyddon had never camped out in winter before, but he was amazed to find that a well-constructed tent can be as warm as a house, even warmer than most houses, and that he did not feel the cold at night.

In his almost daily intercourse with Mary a dangerous point seemed to have been reached and passed over without disaster. The shyness that might have sprung up between them, thanks to the suggestions of busybodies, was swallowed up in the many things they had in common. He grew accustomed to seeing her by his tent fire, to hearing her account of the day's luck in Boscombe when she came back weary from her long tramp in and back, to seeing her prepare the evening meal which she usually shared with him; and to handing her his weekly wages which she eked out with thrift and frugality. Her visits to Bournemouth took place two or three times a week. He also made the acquaintance of her aunt, a hard-featured, sharp-tongued, self-respecting gypsy woman whose fairness showed a certain admixture of cottage blood, though her children were as dark as gypsies of the purest strain. Mrs. Jeff was a wit, too, and her wit sharpened itself at the expense of her neighbours. Finding that her niece was not to be moved as regards Lyddon, she made the best of it, and told people there wasn't no harm in he, he was trying to earn his bit of bread, and he paid our Mary to look after the tent and cook him something in the evening, which was just what she might have said in the beginning had she been amiably disposed.

As for Lyddon, a man who can analyse his feelings towards a woman fancies himself safe. He knew that Mary's charm for him lay not so much in any physical affinity, but because she embodied for him the forest he loved, because she had come into his life like something untamed and fugitive from the woods, because she was wholesome and clean and wild as a bog-stream is clean and wild.

The rat-catcher, whose movements were always irregular, had apparently moved yet farther away on business of his own. Aunt Gerania wrote Mary a letter, by the hand of her daughter at Heavenly Bottom, stating that she would stay a bit longer, until a baby which her daughter expected was born.

So March came and went, and April came, and with it the gorse-bloom. Lyddon found a strange fascination in the holly thickets—the holms, as they were called. He found it possible to walk for miles in and out of thick-walled chambers in this maze of ancient hollies, here and there thinned out, where a fire had devastated them. The fires, Mary told him, occurred annually, in spite of the precautions taken by the authorities to set the keepers to watch. Mrs. Jeff declared boldly that it was “the keepers did it themselves, because the furze grows so thick that they can't get through easily where they has to go.” Still in this thicket of holly trees, in places absolutely impenetrable, no man could watch effectively. The holms round Thorneyhill were separated by a stretch of bog and furze from an even thicker holm which stretched down in the direction of Holmesly. It was country as untamed and wild and virgin as any in the heart of Africa. Only the wild duck and the gypsies knew it well. The keepers knew the paths through it, it is true, but they knew them perforce. Mary and

Lyddon crept through the deep glossy-leaved twilight of the hollies, pushed their way through the flaming gorse, leapt from tussock to tussock in the bog, or walked lightly where the ground quaked, for the joy of exploration.

He was not always accompanied by Mary. On long solitary walks he seemed to retrieve something that had been lost to him, the faculty of dropping thought as it were in the keener faculty of the senses, a faculty which leaves most people after their first youth, the prerogative of childhood and animals and savages.

Mary, too, was busy. The primroses and daffodils were out in the copses, wild violets grew everywhere in the hedges and under the furze-bushes on the moor; and anemones, too frail to survive the long walk to Christchurch. And the gorse was yellow, so yellow that the spikes were covered with the vivid bloom—there is nothing so yellow as gorse with an April sun on it, it is the most yellow and shining flower God ever made, and great stretches of moor were golden with it. The gorse was no good, however, to the flower-sellers; it is unlucky to pluck, like the blackthorn and the may.

There were bright days, hot with sun and fresh with the east wind. The larks climbed high into the sky, the two long pools that lay in the moor between Thorneyhill and Burley were like two eyes of living blue, above which the peewits called to each other. Lyddon used to wander out on to this moor at night, sometimes to listen to their unearthly night-cry as they rose suddenly towards the stars, or to the snickering goat-like bleating of the snipe. To think that success had kept him chained from all this: that it had waited for him spring after spring in vain. There are some men to whom the earth and her seasons mean

deeper emotions than religion to an orthodox believer, and Lyddon was one of them.

He changed his camp every few days. Miss Price, though she proved somewhat of a well-meaning nuisance to him, offered him a corner of her field to retreat to in order to make the necessary disappearance from the hollies which the keepers enforced upon all vagrants. But he preferred the hollies. The Sherratts departed and returned like uneasy spirits, so did other families which in the fellowship of the hollies he had learned to know. He saw something of the hardness of their lives, too—one family was moved on while a child was ill, and it died, as the father had prophesied, when he came to beg the authorities to allow them to stay a little longer. He learnt to know the supreme philosophy which remains hopeful and cheerful though starvation lies behind the morrow. He often shared his bread with those who would cheerfully endure emptiness sooner than take to the servitude of the cottager, or the hard charity of the relieving officer. Freedom was so dear to them that they sold the comfort of their bodies for it. They clung to their hard life because some instinct warned them that they had the freedom which no prosperous roof-sheltered person has, unless he is of the class which has money enough to escape from itself. But even the wealthy can rarely escape from the curse of comfort, the parasitism of servants.

The local point-to-point races, usually held in March, were postponed on account of the heavy rains till Easter Monday, which fell in the middle of April. Lyddon, in common with all the working population of Thorneyhill, had an empty day.

Mary and two of her cousins, Em'ly and Allus,

wanted to go to the races, and they persuaded Lyddon into accompanying them. He assented in a cakes-and-ale mood that made a tramp over country roads to see the racing a prospect agreeable enough. They provided themselves with hunks of bread-and-cheese and started. It was a brilliant spring day, cooled by the east wind. The larks kept up a tireless trilling in the blue sky, and the hedges were ablaze with the golden fire of the gorse.

The three gypsy girls walked along arm in arm in the highest of good spirits, teasing Lyddon, who teased back. There were all kinds of foolish witticisms to be made; about Mary's new kerchief which Lyddon had bought her, and which she declared was dotted over with "girt eyes" watching to see what he was up to, and about Allus's supposed conquest of a keeper's son who had seen her dance, while Em'ly was taxed with an imaginary policeman who had given her a brooch with a swallow on it. Silly delightful nonsensicalities with three pretty girls on a dusty highway under a spring sun—who bothers to think if there is anything in such magpie chatter but just good spirits and youth?

Mary wore the kerchief and a clean apron, and a black hat with mangled artificial flowers on it that had been the gift of a customer in the preceding summer. It was audacious, tawdry, costerish, but it suited her dark vivid face and the great gold earrings. She had the sweetness of expression which atones for everything in a woman. Allus, strange little creature, was gorgeous in large red and yellow beads and a shawl of her mother's which she had attempted, with but partial success, to dye yellow with an infusion of gorse bloom. Em'ly, the beauty of the family and taller than all of them, was of disquieting good looks.

She was beautiful in the splendid, tragic way, though she had not Mary's peculiar charm or her honest eyes. Her great dark eyes were wells of light; when she moved them towards you you saw nothing else, and she knew it. In fact she was a professional beauty, trained by her occasional employment as artist's model into the habit of poses, into consciousness of her loveliness. Em'ly never spoke much. She smiled with a smile that was weighted with the languor of starry nights; she was more refined of speech than her sisters, and disliked being called a gypsy or what she called "low talk, no better than the gruntin' of pigs, I calls it."

No wonder that Em'ly returned from Bournemouth with more money than the rest. She was a curious creature and disliked men. Every time she came back from Bournemouth she had a tale to tell of this or that rye who had spoken to her. But she was as safe, for all her beauty, as the plainest of them. Her ambition was, vaguely, a marriage with a man in comfortable circumstances, and she had not imagination enough to turn her from her purpose.

A fifth member of the party was Prissy's eldest boy — 'Enry, aged eight. 'Enry wore a coat not unlike a coster's without the buttons, and he cherished a miniature pipe which an uncle had given him. He was, as a treat, allowed to have a pinch of tobacco in it now and again. The two elder girls smoked as they went along, and 'Enry walked beside them gloomily, his hands in his pockets.

Lyddon consoled him by the promise that if there were a sweet-stall he should be taken to it immediately.

"And me, too," said Allus.

"'Ush, you greedy little thing!" said Em'ly.

"Shoon to the raunie, chavis!" said Allus, making a face at her, and knowing that Em'ly disliked Romany.

"You be quiet, Allus," said Mary pacifically. "Adam ain't made of money, and he wants to put a bit on the gries."

"Allus shall have her sweets, of course," said Lyddon. "I shall still have a shilling or so to put on the gries, though I don't know what's running the least bit in the world. Who's the favourite, 'Enry?"

The question was satirical, but 'Enry informed him that Fencing Master was a good 'oss.

The girls mocked him.

"Who told you that, 'Enry?"

"Where did you get that, Mister Tattersall?"

"I yeerd 'em talking," said the boy stolidly. "I knows who's riding him, it's Sanders. And he's in for the Hunt Cup."

'Enry was born into the world two feet from a horse's nose, feeding near the tent, and horses were the passion of his young life. He was always making excuses to hang about Lord Redwood's stables, so that it might be that truth issued from the mouth of this babe.

"Are you sure, 'Enry?" asked Mary.

"Yes. He's running at Epsom, too, if he beats Mayfly here."

"Anyway you shall put a shilling on him," said Lyddon.

"What'll you put on?"

He jingled his pocket. "Not much, because I haven't got it to lose."

"I spect dad'll be here," said Mary. "He never misses a race within farty miles. But gypsies and

travellers don't come to meetin's like this, look, 'tain't worth their while."

As they approached the fields which served as race-course, they were constantly passed by motors, one after the other, whitening the hedgerow and choking the pedestrians. The country people stood at their gates to see the gay folk going past, farmers drove by in their gigs, cyclists and motor-cyclists powdered with dust pursued their way—in fact, the quiet country road had become so unlike itself that a policeman stood at the cross-roads to regulate the traffic. The gypsy-girls and their companion went into the field and found rows of motor-cars already drawn up by the ropes, with here and there a carriage, here and there some other horse-drawn vehicle. But the day of the horse has gone, and Lyddon found it in his soul to feel sympathy with Miss Price in her hatred of motor-cars. Here, at an event devoted to the cult of the horse, gathered in their hundreds in the pride of smooth enamel and snug luxury, they were an insolence. Machinery flaunted it before the horse-flesh it had supplanted, the chauffeur seemed to sneer at the groom.

With all his instinctive genius for mechanical science, Lyddon had no passionate love of it for its own sake. It was as if the genius which made scientific toys easy for him to manipulate lived in some compartment separate from his heart. It is said that a man cannot be successful in work which he does not love. Work absorbed Lyddon while he was at it, and he never rested until he had solved a problem which worried him; but at the back of him was the Lyddon who had always disappointed his masters at school, the Lyddon who lost interest when other men

grew keen, who threw up a fight in the moment of victory, the Lyddon with the kink of unexpectedness in him.

They made their way into the second field, where the bookies were yelling "Three to one the field, three to one the field," at the top of their voices. The noise and commotion were exhilarating.

Suddenly Mary pulled at Lyddon's arm.

"There's Alf!" she said.

They were elbowing their way through the crowd, and Lyddon had tight hold of 'Enry's shoulder, lest the child should disappear in the maelstrom of humanity that surged about the bookies.

For a moment Lyddon, flushed with his elbowing through the crowd, could not remember who "Alf" was, then the photograph which Mary had shown him weeks ago rose before his mental vision.

"There he is," said Mary.

Lyddon followed the direction of her eyes. At a little distance from the bookies and further down the hill, for the meadow sloped, a temporary ring had been formed about two rough-looking fellows who were sparring with the gloves, their waistcoats and coats off, and their shirt-sleeves rolled back.

"Which is he?" he asked.

"The smaller of them two what's boxin'," said Mary.

She glanced at him with a kind of questioning coquetry that irritated him slightly.

"Well, we shan't see much of you, then," he retorted. "Come on, 'Enry and Allus, there's a sweet-stall under that tent."

He was free of the crowd now, and walked between the two children into the tent. They bought half a pound of the stickiest sweetmeats on the stall and

then ginger-ale. At this stage he saw Em'ly and Mary at the entrance and turned to invite them to have ginger-ale, too. They accepted cheerfully.

"Let's eat our bit of bread-and-cheese up under the hedge now, before we drops it," suggested Allus, and the proposition was accepted by the party, though 'Enry would rather have hung about the horses in the improvised paddock at the further end. Both Mary and Em'ly were inclined to be silent during the meal.

"I don't see dad, p'raps he ain't comin'," said Mary with a sigh. "Look, there's a yeller butterfly, the fust I seen this year."

"Wish, then," said Allus.

"Don't know what to wish," said she listlessly.

"I knows what I wish," said Allus.

"What then?"

"I keeps that to my kukri."

"That's no word you larned in school," said Em'ly with disdain.

"Ho, my raunie, ain't it a lav you jins!" Allus mocked. "You wait till your boro rye comes along and pookers you before you makes out that Romany chavis is low folki."

"What bookie'll you go to, Adam?" asked 'Enry tensely.

"Pony White looks my man," he replied.

"I knows him," said 'Enry. "You give me that shilling and I'll go down now afore the price gets shorter."

"He won't take money from a tikno like you," said Allus scornfully.

"Let's go together," said Lyddon. "We'll leave the women to themselves for a bit."

Greatly pleased at the assumption that his aunts

and cousin belonged after all to the inferior sex, 'Enry strolled down with Lyddon to the bookies again to make their bets. Fencing Master stood at five to one. Mayfly and Precentor were favourites. The boxing-ring was broken up, and its place taken by a man who was inviting standers-by to place their money on a table marked with numbers. A man with a banjo whose affection no one would have troubled to win, was singing, "You made me love you," to the rows of motor-cars ranged along the course. The cry presently went up, "They're off!" and there was a general movement forward to the left. Lyddon pushed his way through the motors to the rail, and held 'Enry on his shoulder so that the excited boy might have a good view. The horses soon disappeared behind a belt of trees, and it would be a moment or two before they reappeared.

'The brilliancy of the light, the gaiety of the colours, the fashionably dressed women in the motor-cars, gave Lyddon an odd pang of melancholy. There is nothing like a crowd, and a crowd intent on pleasure, to give a man that sudden feeling of mental depression, of intense loneliness, of a loneliness never felt in a forest, of an isolation never present in a desert. Lyddon was conscious of such a detachment now as he watched the flying horses, the eager crowd, the sun glittering on the water-jump half-a-mile away. There was a thin sprinkling of people hastening now to cross the course in order to have a good view of the horses as they came round. He was following them with his eyes mechanically, when a voice said in his ear—

"It is Mr. Lyddon, isn't it?"

Lyddon put the child down and turned round.

A woman of youthful figure and fragile appearance

stood beside him. Her hair was white, and she had a look of exaggerated fragility and delicacy.

"My motor's over there," she said breathlessly, pushing back a grey silk motor veil that the wind had caught. "I was looking about with my glasses and I saw you. I thought I couldn't be mistaken. You know all sorts of things were said about you—that you were drowned, that you had lost your memory, that you had left the country."

"I didn't know," he said honestly, looking her in the eyes. "I hadn't seen a paper."

"Then you didn't—you haven't——" Her distress was obvious.

"My lawyer told me the decision was safe enough," he said bluntly.

"Oh, of course, of course——" She hesitated as if at a loss as to how to proceed.

"I was more sorry than I can say that Eleanor was nearly dragged into it," he added briefly. "But I managed to prevent that."

"Oh, I know, I know. Eleanor showed me the letters you wrote to her."

"It wasn't the kind of business that one likes to see a nice woman dragged into," he said bitterly.

The lady in grey paused, her hand upon the handle of her sunshade. She was in some obvious embarrassment.

"Eleanor is here——" she said, a tremulous smile on her lips. "I think you ought to see her. She has been anxious about you—terribly anxious—and after what she has endured——"

The inner Lyddon growled, "What right has she to be anxious?" and added compunctiously, "Yes, she did behave like a brick, I ought to see her."

He stood irresolute.

"She has suffered on your account," said the lady in grey. "Naturally—I wonder if you realise what her friendship meant."

He did realise, none better.

"How is it that you are down here?" he asked desperately.

"Don't you see—after it was all over poor Eleanor—absolute nervous breakdown. The doctors sent her to Bournemouth. We motored over."

Here was fate inexorable, in the form of a young woman he liked, and was grateful to, but dreaded.

"I can't leave this child," he said. "May I bring him, too?"

"Of course, of course."

He walked beside her moodily. It was not so easy to escape from oneself after all.

Then she put a hand on his arm and spoke in an agitated voice.

"I must tell you, before you see her," she said. "I don't believe you can know. Marjorie is dead."

"Marjorie is dead!" he exclaimed. "My wife dead!"

She nodded her head. "Just after the decree was given," she said. "No, no, I can see what you were thinking. No, thank God it was not that. She was in that express that was wrecked—the Edinburgh express."

He came to a standstill. "I can't see Eleanor yet," he said abruptly. "I've got to realise this. You are sure this is true?"

"Only too sure," she said in a muted voice.

He was silent.

"Do you mind telling nobody you've seen me?" he said after a minute.

"And Eleanor?"

"Oh, tell her," he said, slowly and reluctantly.
"But she will not tell any one?"

"Not if you wish it. But why——?"

"I will tell Eleanor why," said he. It would be wise to see Eleanor once and for all.

"Could you motor over again?" he asked.

"But where are you staying? And, my dear Richard," she gave a half-nervous laugh, "who is this young gentleman?"

"I am staying with friends," he said, with one of his attractive smiles. "This is one of them."

"You like sweets, I see!" she said in a patronising would-be friendly voice which always makes a small boy dumb. 'Enry gave her a brief glance and then scanned the field from his vantage ground on Lyddon's shoulder, for his friend had reinstated him.

"He looks like a little coster," said the lady to Lyddon.

"He's a gypsy," said Lyddon.

'Enry, an acid-drop in his mouth, was sublimely unconscious of them.

"You haven't told me where to meet you with Eleanor," said the lady in grey in gentle reproach.

"It must be a Sunday," he said, and remembered with regret that Sunday was the day on which he and Mary generally went wandering off together.

"It can be a Sunday."

"Could you come as far as Bransgore?" he asked. "I know Eleanor won't mind my not going into Bournemouth. I am camping in the New Forest."

"I know!" exclaimed the grey lady. "Tell me where your camp is, and I will drop her next Sunday afternoon near it. She has an old friend near Bransgore. I can call on some people in Brockenhurst and

fetch her on the way back. You know how Eleanor adores the Forest."

He did remember vaguely, and how she had pressed him to go there. To be advised to go to a place was usually sufficient to deter him from going near it. Dartmoor had been his favourite wandering-ground, South Wales and the Valley of the Wye. Yet perhaps some memory subconsciously preserved had been in his brain when he had taken that mad ride away from London. Yes, this might be another of his many debts to Eleanor.

"Drop her at Thorneyhill post office, please, then," he said. "I will be there at three next Sunday."

His camp would be in Miss Price's field by then, and they would be free from intrusion. Also he would have had a reluctance inexplicable to himself to let Eleanor come to his camp in the hollies. Yet he was bound to both Eleanor and her aunt by many acts of kindness, and he did not let himself forget it.

He bade good-bye to the fragile little lady with a lifting of his battered hat.

"Next is the Hunt Cup," observed 'Enry phlegmatically.

"Let's go and find Mary," Lyddon said mechanically.

The news of his wife's death still rang in his brain. He did not realise it. He had come nearer to liking her in the months when she had actually thrown over convention for the one man she had really cared for than at any time since his quick realisation of their unsuitability in the early days of their marriage.

He began to feel the dull remorse which will overtake the most blameless when brought face to face with their share in the life of the dead. Technically he had nothing with which to reproach himself. He had never been the aggressor, and for the coldness

which springs from an inability to love it is useless for a man to blame himself. She was a hard woman with one soft spot. She had paid for her ambition by losing the sum total of her worldly success in the one wholly unselfish piece of folly she had ever committed. Yet once, a raw youth, he had been dazzled by her, had thought her a goddess. And she was dead. A young woman, though older than himself, she was dead. And it was not defeat in her last frenzied stand, her attempt to throw dirt upon those she knew she had wronged, that had killed her: it was chance.

Chance looks too often like Fate for us to misname and disdain it. What men call chance has often been lying in wait for a thousand years. But there is the human pride of free-will to be pandered to by gods who hide a smile.

And mingled subconsciously with everything else, was that odd misgiving he felt with regard to Eleanor. They had always been friends, he kept on repeating to himself. Why resent the fact that she had found him out?

"Mary's gone!" said 'Enry.

They had reached the hedge where they had left the three girls. There was no sign now of them, neither could they, from the vantage of the hill, see either of the three in the crowd below.

"I'll go and hunt them up," said Lyddon. "You stay here, 'Enry, until I come, and if you see them, tell them I'm looking for them."

He went off in the direction of the refreshment tent, where he expected to find the girls if the young pugilist had really taken them in tow. He would not in truth be sorry, for he could go back to Thorneyhill. But he could not leave until he had given 'Enry into

their charge. He took no further interest in the racing and he had no wish to see Eleanor.

But the girls were not in the tent, and he had perforce to find 'Enry again. At the gate, however, he met Em'ly and Allus.

"Well, you're the lucky one," they said, and Allus caught hold of his arm and began hopping joyfully on one foot.

"Look at him! He don't even know! Dordi, dordi! Where you bin!"

"What, didn't you see the race!" said Em'ly, her lovely eyes on him in surprise.

Allus poured it out in a rush, "Mayfly was leadin', and he would a-won, but he broke his leg at that last jump, you knows, Adam, and 'Enry's hoss come in fust. I saw 'im pass the post! There was the number on him, three——"

"It was Fencing Master, right enough," said Em'ly.

"How much did you put on, Adam!"

"I think it was ten shillings."

"Then what you got? Five posh bars, that's two pound ten. Chavis, chavis, he'll stand us treat!" She jumped about like an excitable dog, her shawl half off her shoulders, a veritable imp.

"I'll stand treat if you go and get 'Enry," Lyddon said. "We'd best claim our winnings from Pony White, and 'Enry won't care to miss that."

Allus darted off, and Em'ly remained.

"Where's Mary?" he asked.

"Mary's gone off with Alf. Mary's funny-tempered to-day. I lay Alf don't get much for his money with her."

Alf again! Lyddon felt a great irritation with Alf. "He has stopped boxing, then," he said.

Em'ly looked at him with her great soft eyes.

"He's always after Mary," she said, with her hoarse subdued voice, which had in it something of the would-be genteel. "He's angry with her now, look, because of what folk is sayin' about you and her."

Lyddon flushed angrily. "If they talk about Mary in connection with me they must be hard up."

"Oh, we all knows there's no harm in it," said Em'ly pacifically. "But Mary's on'y herself to blame. She makes herself out so grand now she's always with you. You'd think to hear her speak there was on'y one man in the world."

"Mary! Mary! is a child. She hasn't half your knowledge of men——" He looked at the beauty with somewhat brutal eyes. "She is simple. Can't you see that there is no more in her being fond of me than there is in my being fond of her? If there were, she wouldn't talk of it."

Em'ly looked cowed but unconvinced, and then Allus reappeared, dragging with her the imperturbable 'Enry, calm in the moment of triumph. They bore down upon Pony White and received their winnings from his big bag with the brass bindings. 'Enry held his six shillings in a hot and dirty hand, and swam in the heightened respect of his female relatives as in a sea of glory. He had seen the race from the hill where Lyddon had left him, but was so masculine that he scorned the outpourings of his young aunt.

They went once more to the refreshment tent, and Lyddon wondered at the capacity of the girls for such gaseous stuff as ginger-ale. An itinerant hawker was selling beads and cheap jewellery outside, and Lyddon bought the girls some chains of gypsyish-looking beads and a brooch labelled "Real Gold" for Mary.

Mary herself came running up to him as he was paying for them.

"Oh, Adam, you've a-won! I'm so glad!"

Her pretty brown eyes were laughing, her face like a rose under its tawdry hat.

He handed her the brooch with a mock bow.

"From the winnings," he said, and then became aware of the young pugilist just behind her, his hair lying in a sleek black curl over his low forehead, his mouth heavy with anger.

"For me!" she said, flushing and her eyes shining up at him. "You shouldn't go buyin' things for me, Adam!" It was softly said in her husky gypsy voice, in a tone of sweet reproach.

Alf Stace came forward, reddening.

"You give it back to him, Mary," he ordered.

She stared at him in astonishment.

"My girl don't want no presents from folks what's ashamed for others to know who they are," said Alf in a blustering voice. Lyddon smelt the beer in his breath. "Givin' her brooches, are you! I knows you! You're a fine one, you are. An artist, are you! Well, you leave my girl alone."

Mary whispered to Lyddon hurriedly—

"Don't take no notice of him, Adam. He's been drinkin'. I'll get him quiet. He don't mean nuthink."

But Alf resisted her touch on his arm.

"An artist, is 'e?" he repeated thickly and ferociously, his anger feeding on itself. "Ho, you cawn't say a word for yourself, can't yer! Gittin' the wimmen to hide yer."

"Look here, my good Alf," said Lyddon calmly. "If you don't want the police here, you'd best clear off. If you want explanations, don't ask for them here."

"Alf! Oo said you could 'Alf' me? I'll b—— well 'Alf' you. Yes, you'd give me up to the b—— police, would yer!"

"You'll give yourself up if you make such a noise," said Lyddon, turning his back on him.

And Mary, her patience exhausted, confronted him like a tigress. "Your girl, am I! Who said I was your girl, or anybody else's girl? If you think because I was took with you at Lyndhurst Fair that I'm anything to you, you're mistook, Alf Stace. Thank the Duvvlus you're none of our folk, a low fightin' mumper you are, and I wouldn't look at you. You ain't worth what Adam there throws away, and I've done with you."

Alf Stace's veins were swollen with wrath. He gave Mary a great push that almost tripped her up.

"You fight it," he shouted to Lyddon. "You fight it."

"Not here," said Lyddon. "But for that push you gave Mary just then I'll fight you as much as you please."

"You're afraid to get your pretty eyes blacked," said the beery youth.

Lyddon turned on his heel and faced him.

"Anywhere you like away from this crowd."

"Don't you fight him, Adam," said Mary. "He's knocked out Billy Hegan."

But the two men had already set off together towards the distant road. Em'ly had melted away, fearing to be drawn into the quarrel, Allus and 'Enry clung to Mary's arm: the girl awed and fearful, the boy with the secret satisfaction and respect that a bodily contest to be always evokes in the mind of a youngster.

"Did Alf hurt you?" asked Allus of Mary. "Oh, are they goin' to fight? Fancy, they chingered over

you, Mary! Wish I was old enough to see the mushes fightin' about me. Ain't you pleased, Mary?"

She began to hop and skip nervously.

"Oh, shut up," said Mary.

She followed the two figures with her eyes.

"Where are they goin' to?" continued Allus irrepressibly. "I lay Alf gets his yokkers bunged up for once. Adam's twice his size."

"It ain't size," said 'Enry contemptuously.

"Be quiet, chavis," said Mary. Then she said, "You bide with Em'ly, I'm goin' after Adam."

"Take me, too," wailed both the children. "I'm comin'," said Allus, following her at a run, and 'Enry clung on to his young aunt's old skirt.

Mary caught him up in her arms and ran, avoiding the press of people, and followed as lightly as a doe by Allus.

Meanwhile Lyddon and his strange companion had turned down the dusty road. Alf Stace kept up a running murmur of what he imagined to be insulting taunt, half frightened lest he might have taken on a bigger job than he bargained for. The hedgerows were white with flowering blackthorn beneath the dust.

"Where can we go?" Lyddon asked. He had not used his fists since his school-days, and the quarrel with this little low-bred ruffian struck him as having its humorous side.

"I don't keer," said Alf Stace sullenly.

"In the next field, then."

The pugilist now preserved a beery silence. The lovely spring air, scented with the perfume which is the perfume of the youth of the earth, met them on a light breeze.

They turned into the field, which was occupied at

its further end by a flock of baa-ing sheep with their bleating offspring.

“Baa-aa!” “Me-eeh!” It sounded like a litany with responses.

Lyddon, now his blood was up, was glad there would be a fight even with such a creature as this. There are times when nothing but fisticuffs will let the demon out of a man, the hard thud of flesh on flesh, the thrust of the arm, the quick decision, the defence, the attack, all using brain and muscle at lightning speed. He knew that his chance against this professionally trained stocky little brute was small, but that did not diminish his satisfaction at the prospect of fighting him. No man had appeared more offensive than Mr. Alf Stace for many a day.

And so it happened that when Mary, Allus and 'Enry appeared, the two men were hard at it, and it was only thanks to the beer that his antagonist had taken that Lyddon could hold his own. He knew himself a beaten man before he started, but if he could only get one blow home it would satisfy him. It was got in at last, but it sobered Stace, and he landed a heavy blow that knocked Lyddon's sense out of him and sent him headlong as a felled ox, with a head bloody enough to justify Mr. Stace's favourite adjective.

CHAPTER XII

ALF, sobered by the fight, and relieved by the victory, awaited Mary's reproach sheepishly.

"What've you done with him?" she asked sharply, with a note of fear in her voice.

"Dazzled 'im a bit, that's all."

She did not waste a look at him. "Go an' get some water as fast as you can."

"There's no water."

"Oh, there's no cottage acrost the road, is there?" she said sarcastically. "And you've no tongue in your head, have you?"

"You b—— well stop ordering me about," he snarled at her, but went off obediently to the cottage which stood at some little distance on the further side of the road.

"Is he bad?" asked Allus, with interest.

Mary had knelt down by Lyddon's head, and was raising it.

"I dunno," she said shortly, with no excess of emotion.

"They always ends up on the ground," Allus remarked. "Didn't he come down hard!"

"I seen Adam land him one," said 'Enry, with quiet satisfaction.

"And s'up me dearie duvvel
Can't the mush koor well,"

hummed Allus nervously.

"If you don't shut your mouth, Allus——" began Mary fiercely.

"I wasn't singin', I was on'y 'ummin'," said Allus.

"Well, you wait to 'um till Adam's better."

"He's movin' now."

"He ain't killed," interjected 'Enry.

"Here's Alf with the water."

Alf Stace assisted in their efforts to bring his fallen foe back to his senses. But when Lyddon had regained them, and sat up somewhat shakily, he slouched off. The service had been rendered out of fear of Mary rather than out of any feeling of chivalry.

"How d'you feel?" asked Mary.

"Right as rain, except for a bit of dizziness."

She was silent. The children stared with fascinated attention at his bloody countenance, which Mary was dabbing with a wet handkerchief.

He attempted to take the handkerchief from her.

"I'm all right," he said. "I *must* have a thin skull. It's the second time I've been knocked silly since I knew you."

"You are bleedin' still," said Mary. "Keep the handk'chf up. I'll tie it for you. I told you not to fight with him."

"Don't be so righteously indignant," he said, with a smile.

She tied up his head for him.

"You'd best sit under the hedge for a bit," she remarked, relenting towards him. "I'm goin' to get you a drop of brandy. If you goes outside lookin' like you does now, you'll have all the folk after you."

"I don't want any brandy," he replied.

"It'll pull you together."

"I'll get it myself."

"And have a crowd round you! No, I'm goin'. I shan't be long, and I want to see if dad's there, too.

They wouldn't serve Allus, she's too small. You comin', 'Enry?"

"No, I'm goin' to bide along of Adam," said 'Enry faithfully.

"Don't you bother him now!" warned Mary, departing.

Allus and 'Enry squatted opposite their defeated hero.

"Blood's a-comin' through the han'kercher," said Allus. "You must a-knocked against a stone."

"Perhaps," said Lyddon cheerfully, mopping it.

"You was silly to take him on," Allus continued. "You might a-knowed he'd best you, although you're so much bigger."

"Adam landed him one," repeated 'Enry. "Jesse Pidgeley went down without hittin' back onst when he stood up against Alf."

"Do your head ache?" asked Allus.

"Not worth talking of," he assured her.

"Like to yer me sing a song about fightin'? It come into my head just now while you was on the ground. Uncle Noah gives me a penny when I sings it to he." She hummed it again in her rather nasal little voice.

"If you want to sing, sing," said Lyddon resignedly.

"You won't know what 'tis about."

"Why?"

"Ah," said she mysteriously, and began—

"Mandy soved last rati
In the granzi adray
With my tawni rakli,
And the gavmush hovved to mandy
To lel mandy avri.

Mandy striped off at him
 And delled him in the pur;
 And s'up me deara duvvel,
 Can't the mush koor well! "

(Baa-aa-aa! bee-ee-eeh! went the sheep and the lambs
 as accompaniment.)

"Ho ov along o' me, my mush!
 Ho ov along o' mandy!
 Mandy amunged a shubli cart
 From the kair among the trees.
 When mandy munged the cart
 And nashed it avri
 The gavmush oved to mandy
 To lel me avri.
 But what a kushti bit of kel
 Mandy will lel
 Along with my romany rakli gal!

Mandy jalled to puv the gry
 All around the stuggas avri
 A mush hovved to mandy
 To lel me avri.
 Mandy striped off at him
 And delled him in the pur;
 And s'up me deara duvvel,
 Can't the mush koor well!

It was all through me rakli
 A-makin' of the godli
 As brought the mush to mandy
 What lelled me avri.
 Mandy striped off at him
 And delled him in the pur;
 And s'up me deara duvvel,
 Can't the mush koor well! "

"D'you like that?" she ended up abruptly.

His head was still swimming, but he assured her that he did. Allus would have amused him if he had been dying, with her elfin face and her unexpectedness.

"And what does it all mean?" he asked, supporting his head in his hands.

"It's all about a man what slept with his girl in

a barn and she made a noise, and when he was goin' to put the harse in the cart they was taken, and he hit the gavmush in the stummick what come to take him to the lock-up," said she breathlessly.

"Oh."

"Will you give me a penny for that?"

"You can take it out of my pocket in the coat over there."

Allus availed herself of the permission promptly.

"You mayn't have nuthink left to-morrow," she observed. "That's why I sung it now."

"Better take twopence, then," he said.

She did so.

"There's Aunt Mary and Uncle Sam?" remarked 'Enry.

Lyddon got up and walked towards them and assured the rat-catcher that he was all the better for the fight.

"Come and have a drink, then," said the rat-catcher. "We'll get Alf to have a drink too, and all end up friendly. Alf loses his 'ead after the first few glasses; he don't drink like what we do, but after the next couple, you'll see, he'll be cryin' on your neck and askin' yer pardon for makin' a fool of hisself."

"No, thanks," Lyddon replied. "I'll be walking home, I think."

"What, tired of the races!"

"Tired of the crowd that's looking on."

"Ah, you're right there! What right've they to be lookin' at hosses? Lots of 'em don't know one end of a hoss from t'other. Motor-cars. Motors everywhere. A fine look out for us harse dealers. I could cry when I sees a crowd like that. You're right, Adam. I on'y just looked in, like, meself. I got a harse and cart outside, I'll drop you in Tharneyhill myself. But we

won't be done out of our drink neither, as I've a word to speak at the Carpenter's Arms. You been winnin' golden bars, I hears."

"They wouldn't let me bring the brandy out of the tent," Mary explained her empty-handedness.

"I'll see you to-morrow, my girl," said her father. "S'up me duvvel, she looks prettier each day, don't she, Adam? Ain't she the pretty little raunie!"

Mary blushed, and the rat-catcher, who had also been enlivened by a glass of liquor, caught her by the waist and kissed her. Lyddon got up into the cart, the gypsy joined him, and they drove off through the lanes.

Lyddon guessed rightly from the rat-catcher's reference to his winnings, that he was to pay the reckoning at the Carpenter's Arms, but when he came to think of it afterwards he had no recollection of doing so. Whether his fall had renewed in some minor degree the concussion of some weeks ago, he did not know, but the glass of old ale which he drank at the rat-catcher's instigation, increased rather than diminished the swimming of his head. A drowsiness seemed to hover over him, his eyelids were ready to fall. The Carpenter's Arms is a favourite house of call with carters, drovers and gypsies on their way to and from Christchurch and the New Forest. It is a free house, and is kept in the old style. This afternoon it was crowded with men brought to the district by the races, and Sam appeared to be known to most of them. The bar reeked of strong tobacco. Black boy and rank shag smoke filled the place. Your true countryman loves neither open door nor open window, and the atmosphere was thick. Lyddon heard as in a dream Sam boasting interminably that his nephew of eight years had spotted the winner

of the Hunt Cup. Then the talk turned as interminably on poultry. One man said that a hen of his, a cross between a white Wyandotte and a Dorking, laid three eggs in one day. "And how many yolks do you suppose there was to the three?" "Six!" hazarded two listeners. "Nine!" said the owner. "Ah, but they freak layers is no good for steady——" began a third heavily, during a pause of disbelief.

"She never laid no more. I killed her next day. But they was girt eggs as big as a swan's almost."

At last the rat-catcher arose, and Lyddon, surprised to find himself still awake, went after him into the sunlight and east wind. The wind had risen since morning, and frisked with the dust loosened by the extra traffic, until the road looked like a dust-storm in the Sahara.

His companion's silence did not trouble the rat-catcher, however, who talked cheerfully about a mare which he had sold to a farmer. Up the long Bransgore hill, bordered by the yellow gorse, they went, past the gravel pits, and past the little shop down towards the hollies. When they arrived at Mrs. Jeff's cottage, Sam had to shake Lyddon awake.

Mrs. Jeff, who came out at the shout of her brother-in-law, stared at him, her youngest child Vi'let clinging on to her skirt.

"Motto, is he?"

"A drop of ale on a broken head," said Sam. "He'd bin fightin'——"

"Ho, us knows all about that," said Mrs. Jeff, with the smile of incredulity. "Where's the gals, Adam?"

"They're coming behind," he said drowsily.

"Can you walk out to your tan in the bushes, or shall Sam help you?"

He refused, glassily staring, and walked unsteadily

into the bushes. His head was not too befuddled to find his way. He was divided as neatly into two as an earwig which continues to move when its grosser part has been cut away. He could reason clearly with part of his brain, which pointed out to the other part that he had been a fool to drink old ale after he had had such a thump on his skull. From the contemplation of his own thin-skulledness, his mind, still coolly spectator of his torpor, wandered to the consideration of skulls in general, from the Danish skulls found in Kent dented with war-axes, to the skulls in museums, and he wondered if, when his bones were disturbed in centuries to come, those who saw his cranium unfleshed, would discover two thickenings where Nature had done her best to repair her fault in making the bony protection to his brain somewhat thinner than most people's.

The fact remained that the ale had reduced him to something resembling intoxication. He remembered reading once that concussion sometimes rendered a man susceptible to alcoholic fumes, and he was now demonstrating the fact. He found his tent in the heart of the bushes, viewed it as through a waving glass screen, and was soon asleep like a log.

Meanwhile the east wind was as high as ever. It rushed never-ceasingly, shaking the hollies, bending their stiffness, whistling through the gorse, beating down the low, dried grass, driving dead leaves of the past winter before it as dust before a besom. Nothing was too high for it or too low for it. There was a joy of life in it, a keen edge warmed by the sun, which sent the larks up to battle with it, and set the colts galloping backwards and forwards to their dams. It made cloud shadows race after one another across the boggy moor, and patch it with blue and gold and brown and dusk, till one hill looked like the robe of

the princess, and the next the drab gown of the gypsy. It played fantastic tricks with sun and shade and hollow and hill. It leapt on and on, rejoicing in havoc, stirring young blood, rousing the passion of spring in the ancient earth.

Mary, Em'ly, Allus and 'Enry walked back. Mary had avoided her former swain when she saw him again on the course, and he had gone away sulking. Em'ly, beautiful and untroubled by small troubles as any goddess, was well pleased with her day, for she had the placid nature which rides above the clouds in perpetual sunshine. 'Enry was content, for he had six shillings in his pocket and the memory of a fight. Allus was in a tiresome mood, Mary frankly dejected. To add to her depression 'Enry had related how his friend had been recognised and spoken to by a real raunie. Mary was in fears for the safety of the supposed refugee. Who knew whether to-morrow it might not be necessary for him to pack up and go far away? She had never thought of the possibility of his being recognised when she had pressed him to accompany them to the races.

They walked up the long hill in silence, passed constantly by returning motors. The evening was drawing in, the sky was thinly spread with windy-looking clouds, in the shape of a fan and caught with the rosy fire of the setting sun. When they reached the top of the plateau, however, and turned down towards Mrs. Jeff's cottage, they perceived that the horizon was dark. A heavy mantle of smoke lay along it like a horizontal column, opaque, turbid, ominous. Wisps of it drifted into their faces, the acrid smell of burning was in the air, light ashes were whirled past them on the high wind.

"There—another fire!" said Em'ly. "This yer wind have caught it. That's why we seen so few men about, they're gone to beat it out, you may be sartain."

When they got to the road which separated the holm from the village, they could see that the fire had attacked the further holm which stretches away to Holmesley. The smoke lay like a pestilence against the clear blue sky and windy, pink tresses of thin cloud higher up.

Mrs. Jeff stood at her door expectant of them, her sun-bleached hair blown back from her reddened face.

The two children ran to her, and began to pour out the history of the day, but Mrs. Jeff silenced them with sharp good-temper.

"There's tea waiting for you inside, chavis. Ker see now, and come in. You too, 'Enry; I tauld yer mammy you was goin' to bide with granny till she come for you."

"Where's dad and the boys?" Em'ly asked, following them into the cottage with Mary. Vi'let sat already at table, her huge black eyes fixed on the newcomers.

"Gone to beat out the fire."

"It's a big one, ain't it?"

"Started in two places to onst," Mrs. Jeff replied. "Course 'twould burn a day like this, with everything dry as straw and a high wind. And they as set it going knew it."

"The keepers was watching yesterday."

"The keepers!" Mrs. Jeff said contemptuously. "'Tis their watching what does it."

"And all the birds buildin' there, and the young birds," said Mary regretfully. "I hates to see green wood burn. Last year there was a lark what wouldn't leave her eggs. I found her next day, half burnt she

was, and dead on top of her eggs. The fire'd gone clean over her."

"Adam'll have to move," said Allus. "He's right in the middle of the holm up there. I lay he's helpin' to beat it out."

"He's no good for nothin'," said Mrs. Jeff, offering 'Enry, her favourite grandson, a large slice of bread spread with dripping. "When he come here, he'd been drinkin' himself silly and could hardly hold 'isself straight."

Mary jumped up suddenly, her face white beneath the tan.

"Suppose he don't know!" she burst out.

"Sit down, you silly gal," said her aunt. "How could he help hearin' a noise like that, if he was ever so drunk? They hollies crackles and bangs like moskys goin' off."

"But you don't know where he is," Mary answered swiftly. "He's right in the middle of the hollies and fuzzes. He chose it because it was so deep in." Her chair fell with a clatter as she pushed it aside, and she had gone through the always open door of the dwelling-room before any of them could offer advice.

"Mary! Mary!" they shouted after her, but she was out of hearing.

"No, you don't, 'Enry!" said his grandmother, exasperated. "Sit down, chavis. Not one step does you go until you've finished eating. Allus, you naughty girl, you come back this minnit."

"He wasn't drunk when he left us," Em'ly said.

"Then he got drinkin' with Sam. Drunk he was when he come home. I watched him as he jalled off, walking careful as if the ground was a rope and he tryin' to balance on it. But he's right enough. Mary's divvy about him. She'll have them all sayin' she've a

took up with him afore long. If Mary was my gal she'd a-had some chastisement from me afore now."

"I wants to go with Mary," said Allus, beginning to pout.

"You'll have to want, my gal," said her mother.

Allus was the favourite, and knew that her mother's harshness, once she had fled, would not very long survive her return. She wriggled herself free, and darted out across the strip of green, across the road and into the hollies after her cousin.

CHAPTER XIII

MARY ran on, hatless, her black hair whipping into her eyes. The further holm was attacked, but she had first to thread a circuitous way through the nearer, following the winding paths made by the feet of generations of forest ponies and gypsies. The donkeys had nibbled the walls of green until they were compact and smooth, and the hollies grew in dense groups with hollow underspaces so as to form what were almost little dwelling houses or natural sheds, roofed and walled in, the breach which was the opening serving as both door and window. In just such a natural harbour had Lyddon made his camp, and if he were really in such a condition that the crackling of the fire did not wake him, he might find himself in a cage of fire, for she remembered that furze bushes bordered one side of his camp, and these burn steadily when they have caught.

But the hollies would warn him, she hoped, for they burn noisily, as if in agony. There is a peculiar spirit resident in hollies which is friendly to human life, and these groves had harboured nomads for centuries, had screened the embraces of wild lovers on summer noons, had witnessed gypsy honeymoons beneath the stars, had seen the birth of babes and the death of the aged.

She came into the opening at last, where an arm of boggy country separates the two holms. She was too impatient to cross by the ford higher up, but went light-footed across ground which rocked and quivered, or over the silver green of the bog moss, or from tussock to tussock where the brown bog ooze lay exposed. The

incense of the golden-budded myrtle came up to her like the spirit of the marshes.

The fire was on the hill; she heard its sinister cracklings, the flares and explosions of it, and saw its yellow tongues shooting up into the darkening sky. Quite close a rabbit fled past her, the plovers cried in distress. She came nearer, and smoke made her eyes smart; the air was full of ashes.

Then she began to plunge into the hollies themselves, working uphill. She came on charred hollies, still smoking, their burnished green destroyed for ever. Some were scorched brown and had their leaves still on them; others, directly in the path of the fire, were black skeletons, with grey filaments for leaves, the trunks still glowing when the wind caught them, and sending up little threads of flame and smoke. The furze bushes were blackened too, their golden blossom devoured by the fiercer gold of the flames. Her path lay between them, and she pushed on. The heat was considerable; the charred vegetation brushed against her like a hundred points of charcoal. But the fire had nothing left to consume here; the wind had borne it onward, greedily.

Mary became seized with a fear born less of knowledge and experience than an instinct, a stirring of some atavistic fear of fire. The air was full of it, the dumb animals felt it; there was the suffering of growing things all about her, mute, unexpressed, an atmosphere of fear. Never had she heard of any human being being caught in a forest fire. But though he had out-of-door instincts, this big stranger was an alien. The forest could not warn him by instinct as she would have awakened one whose blood was forest blood. And he, who never drank, was drunk, his ears sealed, perhaps.

She sped on, and at the next turn of the path came

face to face with a youth. His face was smutty, his hands were black, and he carried a half-charred bough.

"It's Tom!" she exclaimed.

"Where be you goin', then?" her cousin asked.

Her words came excitedly—

"You seen Adam?"

"I don't know as I have. Was he beatin'?"

"His tent was in there."

"Well, I allow he's moved it."

"It's all burnt?"

He jerked his hand backwards. "Up there right across the holm. I'm goin' round to beat on the other side. They'll get it under soon now. You can't go into they hollies, my girl; you'd catch afire. There's smouldering stuff everywhere."

She knew she could not, and stood still, inarticulate. Tom Jeff took her arm, and pulled her good-humouredly after himself.

"Ov along, my rakli!" One is jocose in Romany in this half-gypsy village. "The mush is all right, he's saved his tan; and if it's burnt, a couple of sacks'll make a new 'un."

"It's not the tan, it's him. He was drunk."

"Drunk?" Tom looked puzzled and scared. Then he laughed. "You'll find him up amongst the beaters, Mary."

She shook herself free.

"I'm goin' up here first."

"You ain't."

"I be. Lemme go, Tom."

She wrenched herself loose a second time, and ran up the path of smoking desolation.

Tom stared after her, and then went on his way. After all, Mary could look after herself. He thought

her on a wild-geese chase, though the possibility that a drunken man asleep in the hollies might be stupefied still more with smoke and entrapped gave him an uneasy feeling at the back of his self-assurance.

He turned round to shout "Mary!" but she was already out of sight. So he went on, thrashing to right and left of him at the blackened furze, and muttering to himself. In common with most of the Thorneyhill folk he looked upon Lyddon with suspicion, and resented his intimacy with Mary. Let a girl stick to her own folk.

Mary hurried on. She scarcely reasoned why she did so—she was driven by instinct rather than emotion, the instinct which keeps a bird hovering about its nest in times of danger, the instinct to protect that which is loved, the instinct which links brute to man and jungle to village. Then she came to a place which was impassable. The path was swallowed up in the midst of the smoking ruin. Grey ashes like phantoms shivered on the wind, the furze was blackened, the hollies still quivering with sparks where the wind caught the standing and blackened branches. Sparks flew into her face and into her hair; she smelt the odour of burnt hair, of singed clothing. In here, just in here, had been his tent, further in. If she could brave the plunging through, she could see for herself. But the smoke had inflamed her eyes, ashes had blown into them. She turned her back to the wind for a moment and pressed her hands over them. Behind her she heard footsteps, and guessed that Tom Jeff had turned and come after her, to prevent her by force from going farther. She had no time to lose, and she wheeled about and, putting her arms before her, began to push her way through the smoking tangle before her. But her eyes smarted so painfully that she could not see, and she fumbled

forward, blinking and guessing. She had to pause, and then she felt a grasp on her shoulder.

"Lemme go!" she said.

She was swung off her feet and carried backwards, and her arms were pinned helplessly.

She struggled in vain. She was carried back into the path, and sat down.

Angrily she faced the interfering creature, and before her reddened eyes could see, she realised that it was Lyddon himself, uninjured, sober and cool, though his face was like a sweep's, his eyes bloodshot, like hers, with the smoke.

"You must come out of here at once," he said peremptorily. "Your dress is smouldering, look." He grasped it with his hands and extinguished it, and then walked her quickly out of the charred path of the fire. They reached the bog, crossed it, and then he pulled her down beside him on a tussock of heather on the further side.

"We're a pretty pair!" he said, looking at her.

Mary caught hold of his arm, and began to laugh and cry together. "They told me you was drunk. I didn't know where you was," she said incoherently.

"Well, if I'd been asleep in there and caught by the fire I think the noise would have awakened me. As it was, one of the Sherratt children came to move the tent and found me there. What did you expect to find? Roast man? You silly child, don't cry!"

"I didn't know how drunk——" she said between her laughter and sobs, as one to whom drunkenness was a matter of experience. "When father gets real motto, he wouldn't hear nuthin' nor nobody."

"Mary, dear!" he said, with sudden huskiness of voice.

Somehow, inevitably, she was clinging to him, and

their lips were together, and though the kiss was acrid with smoke and salt with Mary's tears, it seemed to him for a dizzy moment as if all that was sweet and wild in the forest were sending a madness which was of spring through his veins.

"I loves you," she said, near his throat, in a soft, hoarse voice.

"Mary——"

"D'you like me, Adam?"

"Like you!" He took her brown, smoke-grimed face in his two hands, and kissed her again and again, almost brutally.

She shut her eyes, then opened them and smiled.

"That's what I likes! That's what I wants!"

He was suddenly sobered a little, and released her.

"Well," he said, with an attempt at a laugh, "you're satisfied that I wasn't drunk enough to get burnt."

She laid her head against his hand.

"How did you get drunk, Adam?"

"I don't know that it could be properly called a drunk," said he, deliberately light in manner. "Your Alf got in a good blow, and I suppose it made me carry liquor badly."

"Then it was becos of me?" she said, with glowing eyes, looking up at him.

"I must get Alf to give me lessons."

"He ain't none of mine," she said, frowning.

"Oh, come, after what you told me."

"I never told you chee. I never told you nothin'."

"Yes, you did," he said half-teasingly.

She was silent for a moment.

"How did you know where I was?" she asked.

"I met Tom Jeff. He should have stopped you."

"He tried to."

"Silly child," he said, in an access of tenderness which got the better of prudence.

"Kiss me," she said crudely.

"It isn't wise," he said unsteadily.

"Who cares? I loves you, Adam. I never kissed a man afore, I swear to God I haven't. I shouldn't have cared if I'd a-catched afire in they hollies. I'd hold my hand in fire for you."

She put her arms about his neck and her face close to his.

He bent back, tried to draw them away.

"No, dear, you don't understand."

She loosened her hold and gazed at him.

"You don't want me to touch you. You're a gennleman."

It was said without rancour or bitterness.

He seized her shoulders roughly, and kissed her now passive mouth. Prudence, already wavering, shook her skirts and left him. He was mad for the moment, and the madness was for a girl with a dirty face and tangled hair. No; to do her justice, it was more than that. Mary was sweet, Mary had the allurements of the youth of all the ages, and her eyes were wet with the love of all wild things that love generously and passionately. She was sweet with the sweetness of bracken and of heather, she was life and vitality incarnate, she was yielding and caressing as the strong spring wind from the east which had carried fire with it over the moor.

"It's gettin' dark," she whispered at last.

It was. And the wind had lessened, as if the departure of daylight had weakened it.

He sat up, and pushed back his hair from his forehead.

"What's to be done?" he said.

"There's your tent," she said. "Where are you atching?"

"Near the road, by the Sherratts' camp. I didn't mean that; I meant what are you and I to do?"

"I'm goin' back home, to aunt's," she said simply.

He sat silent, his big reddish head thrust a little forward, his long, lean legs straight out before him.

"Look here, Mary," he said. "This is impossible."

"What's impossible?" she said, flushing. "There's no law ag'in kissing, is there?"

"It isn't fair on you."

"I asked you to kiss me; now, didn't I?"

"I'd no right to."

"You'd the right any man has to kiss a girl what asks him to. I'm bound to be kissed some time, look. Alf Stace tried to kiss me to-day. All he kissed was the wind."

"Alf Stace wants to marry you," he said bluntly.

"It takes two to marry," said Mary, raising her clear brown eyes. "Do you think I'm one of them what's always thinkin' what this and that means, and if this and that'll be a good thing or not? I knows you ain't goin' to marry a traveller girl. I'm glad you ain't. I can look after myself. We gypsies is made to look after ourselves. What I gives you, I gives you. If I wants to walk through that holly there, I can. If I wants your kisses, and you wants to give them, I'm not ashamed of it. I didn't know you liked me that way till to-night, p'raps; I didn't know I liked you that way neither." She came nearer, her cheek against his. "Don't you worry yourself, Adam," she said in her husky, sweet young voice.

He took her two hands without looking at her.

"I wish you'd say you was fond of me, Romany way," she said.

"What is that?"

"I koms tuty," she said in a voice just above a whisper.

"What does that mean, dearest?"

"It means somethin' more than lovin' or likin'. It means the same as wantin'. It sounds more natural like, than anything else in the world. It sounds the way a child wants its mammy and dry dust wants the rain."

"I believe that is the way I love you," he said.

It was the first time that he had used the word, and now he had a quick pang of regret that he had done so. He had the feeling of broken confidence, a man's fear of a new and dubious relationship, and with it all the knowledge that he had no right to accept anything from her. He felt unhappy, disturbed.

"Mary, you must go home."

"I'm goin'." She stood up. "What about your bit of food?"

"I can make it myself to-night."

"Awright."

Her fine instinct told her that he would rather be left alone. She accepted his decision. The habit of obedience to the man was strong in her. She made no attempt to delay her going.

"Good-night, Adam."

She began to walk away, but, still moved by the feeling that he had done her an injury, he got up in an impulse of remorse. Yet what could he do, what could he say?

"You are not vexed with me?" he said, pursuing her, and putting his big hands upon her young shoulders.

She smiled through tears ready to fall.

"Course not," she said.

Then she disappeared down the dusky path.

The scent of the bog myrtle was strong about him. They had bruised the plants with their feet. Somewhere a peewit cried, and away to the north he heard an owl uttering its call to a phantom mate. He began to move in the direction of camp.

CHAPTER XIV

A BUMBLE-BEE came blundering into the tent, and the sun came with it. Lyddon sat up. His head was still painful, and he had slept badly and gone to bed supperless. He foresaw the inevitable danger if he continued to see Mary as much as formerly. Yet he saw no way of avoiding that danger unless he went away, unless he put the forest behind him. For the threads which held him to his present existence were intertwined with those which bound him to Mary. The forest had become Mary for him, and Mary the forest. She had become the embodiment of sun and shade, of young leaves moving in the wind, of bog myrtle and heather, of gorse and of white-thorn. He shut his eyes and felt the blood mounting into his face as he remembered her and the sweetness of her, and her face like a dusky rose, the smell of wood smoke which clung to her, and the feel of her body in his arms. Mary was dangerous, and more dangerous because she stood for what was innocent and wild and free.

He made no effort to evoke the arguments which civilised society would bring against such an incongruous passion, her alien blood, her primitive manners, her speech. With the warm ghost of her still at his heart these idiosyncrasies appeared whimsical details, differences from civilised women, which were as essentially part of her charm as the brambles and tangle are part of the forest. Uncivilised she might be, but not vulgar. Primitive she might be, but not tawdry. Coarse of speech, perhaps, but fine of spirit.

Danger lay in argument. The truth was that she

was not out of her setting. He was, and felt himself the anomaly rather than Mary. A gulf remained between them. He could not wrong Mary by bringing her into the world he had left behind him (God forbid!), and he could not follow her entirely into hers. She recognised that as well as himself—she had not considered the possibility of a marriage between them. She had said, "I can take care of myself." At the same time he seemed to hear Miss Price's crude, "Don't forget that Mary has a character to lose."

The bumble-bee was still bumping his velvet body against the tent, unable to find the opening. He remembered that in Mary's world this was a sign of a stranger's coming. In her world fate cast shadows before it, and Nature lent itself in a myriad ways to warn the initiated of what lay on their path. Stars, insects, flowers, dreams, were all foretellers of the future, for like all people who live close to the earth, gypsies are fatalists. Something of their belief had crept into him, and the enervating drowsiness of the spring morning wooed him to believe that it would be better to await events, to wait and see what was in store for him. The bumble-bee found its way out at last. Its moment had arrived, his moment would arrive. Mary's moment would arrive too.

Other things arose in his mind. With his wife's death many knots had been cut. He would write to his solicitors. The Belloni Syndicate business must be settled up. He must withdraw. Any work that he did in the future must be non-commercial, done away from the foot-lights, achieved for the pleasure of achievement alone. Success must never again chain him down.

As for money, with his resurrection, he could draw again upon his bank. The Belloni shares and other investments, in spite of the inroads which had been

made upon his capital by his wife's extravagance and the cost of the legal proceedings, would yield enough to enable him to live as a poor man all the days of his life. He almost laughed aloud. What a cobweb his prison had been. It had been easy to break through. True, his wife had stood between him and freedom, but the rest—the phantom conventions, the property and obligations to Society and the other shibboleths had broken before him like shadows.

He dressed and went up to Miss Price's house. The old gentlewoman was out in her garden—she never lay abed after half-past six.

"You've nearly finished," she said. "You have worked at twice the pace of the ordinary working man. It only proves everything that I have always thought about the British artisan. A gentleman is conscientious. What are you going to do when you have done with my coach-house?"

"Nothing!"

"Paint, I suppose," she said, with a sniff. "I wish I could see some of your painting."

"I shall have enough to keep me in idleness, if I live the life of a vagrant," he returned, smiling.

"What a pity. You are an excellent workman. Well, I hope you will come and see me sometimes. This morning I should like you to come in to breakfast with me. I have attacks of loneliness sometimes. I often think I shall have to adopt a child. You've breakfasted? Well, have another. I want to talk to you."

He yielded, and found himself seated opposite her at a sunny breakfast-table. Tulips, pink as the roses on the cups and saucers, graced the centre, a silver coffee-pot stood over the blue flame of a silver lamp. Everything spoke of comfort, of taste. Lyddon was served with kidneys and bacon. Old-fashioned water-colours

and daguerreotypes hung on the walls, a family portrait over the mantelpiece, and a portrait of King Edward in a silver frame just beneath it, between two Dresden shepherds. There was an air of old-world gentility about the room, far removed from the suburban affectations of modern chintz and acquired simplicity.

"Isn't it pleasant to be civilised again?" said she maliciously. "Don't you relish the flesh-pots? Wouldn't you enjoy a hot bath?"

"Are you acting the Delilah?" he asked. "In any case I resent the last imputation. It is one of the delusions of the Englishman that one can get clean by soaking in water."

"How long is it since you drank out of china?"

"Some months now."

"Well, I admit that it has suited you. But you are out of place, my dear man, out of place. I love these hawkers, but I should be play-acting if I went and lived in a tent."

"Every existence has its discomforts," he said. "The discomforts of living the life I'm living weigh light against those I have had as accompaniments to this——" He indicated the luxuries of the breakfast-table.

"Do you regard it as a half-way house, or as a permanent philosophy?"

"Isn't everything a half-way house as we come to it? If we have infinity before and behind us, any point is a centre."

"Evasive. You are not honest with yourself. You interest me. You are not one of those dreadful people who try to live the simple life, and write and tell all their friends about it, and have electric cookers, and go home when it rains. You don't pose. You give me the impression of an Ishmael with a religion, a kind of mysticism. A large, irresponsible Ishmael."

"Why attempt to find a label for me?" he asked, with an uncomfortable smile. "I like to be out of doors, that is all. There is no mystery about me. I like to wake up and feel the ground beneath me, and to look out and see the bracken and gorse, and to be able to move where I like, to feel the wind and see the stars at night. I've wanted to all my life: to live the life I've got before me now. I couldn't before."

"And if you marry?"

"My wife is dead."

"You will marry again," she said. "And she will drag you back into the commonplace. All married life, however romantic, does."

"I don't intend to marry."

"You will marry or grow inhuman."

"Why?"

"Absolute freedom is another word for loneliness," she said, "and loneliness is the worst prison of all."

That was true. He remembered the horrible loneliness he had experienced the first evening in the holms, the evening that Mary had not come; or was it that he had missed Mary? Now he thought of it, it seemed to him that he must always have wanted her, that she had attracted him from the beginning. Mary! He felt a rush of desire for her, for her brown face flushed with rose, for the little throat against which the beads lay red, and the hands with the silver rings. He grew suddenly impatient of this nice old lady with her arch subtleties. The room began to suffocate him. Miss Price was still talking.

"And how old are you?" she was saying.

"Thirty-two," he answered. (And Mary must be half his age, he added in mental commentary.)

"Of course you must marry," wound up Miss Price.

He had missed the chief part of her discourse. "But not out of your class."

"Whom?" he asked ironically.

"I know a woman—a girl, whom I should like you to meet. She is exceptional——"

"Eccentric?"

"I said exceptional. She is clever and pretty, inclined to humbug herself, but gold at bottom. You would do her a world of good, and she you. She is a dear, charming girl, and has the modern affectation of being a devotee to the outdoor life. She has camped out. Loves it. There is the ideal companion for you. You could wander where you like. If babies came—well, of course, you'd have to modify your existence. Her father was a parson here, years ago, a Mr. Hinton, an old friend of mine."

"You are not talking of Eleanor Hinton?" he exclaimed, suddenly awake.

"You know her."

He flushed slightly.

"We are old friends."

"You are never Richard Lyddon? The genius—the wireless man? Oh, I am so sorry."

"My name is Lyddon," he said. "You needn't apologise."

Miss Price began to laugh weakly. "And you mended my bell!"

"Satisfactorily, I hope."

"You were engaged to Eleanor once——"

"Twelve years ago. She broke it off, and I married."

"It was a boy and girl affair?"

"Absolutely. We kept up our friendship."

"Ah yes," said Miss Price slowly. "Which there was an attempt to misinterpret when——"

"It was not brought into court," he interposed.

"I heard of it. So all that unhappy business is over. Your wife is dead?"

"Yes."

He waited impatiently for her to rise from table. He disliked this opening of closed chapters.

"Do you know that Eleanor is staying near here?"

"I do."

"Then you have seen her? Please forgive my curiosity. But this is such a coincidence, so strange. You must forgive me for having acted the bull in the china-shop—appeared so impertinent, so——" She broke off.

"Of course, you wouldn't know," he said. "But you will excuse me, if I have to get to work?"

She rose, at last. "I am going to call on Eleanor to-day in Bournemouth. I drive as far as Christchurch. Am I to say that I have met you or not?"

"Say exactly what you please, Miss Price," he said, with inner annoyance. "Eleanor is coming over on Sunday to see me."

"Then use my house, unless you want to give her tea in your tent. I shall be out."

"You are very kind. But I wish you were going to be in."

"You are both old enough to dispense with a chaperone," she said. "And unconventional enough too. I'll stay to see her, and then run away. It's my day for tea-ing at Bransgore, and going on to Evensong from there. You, I suppose, are a Pagan?"

"It depends what you mean by the word."

"Well, go back to my coach-house. Some day I shall scribble up in pencil, 'Richard Lyddon, his work.' I will tell Eleanor to come here. She is with her aunt, a woman I detest. All sentimentality and grey chiffon."

Miss Price rammed on her old straw hat, took up the

shears she had left in the porch, and returned to the garden. She turned round as he was disappearing into the stable-yard to call out—

“When are the Jameses going up country?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. He was thankful that Mary’s name had not this time been dragged into the conversation. He liked Miss Price, in spite of her proclivity for cross-examination. He had a dislike, which was almost morbid, of sharing his private affairs with others. He swore inwardly at Miss Price, while he appreciated the fact of her kindness. He was easily impatient of the interest of others in himself, like many other reserved men. But it was impossible to be long angry with Miss Price. She was such a benevolent old Tory, so tactless, so sunny.

He saw nothing more of her that day. As evening approached, he wondered if he should find Mary in his tent when he returned. What should he say to her? What could he trust himself to say to her? At any rate, Miss Price had acted like a tonic. She had shaken him out of the fatalistic mood of the morning when he had faced the question.

But Mary was not in the tent when he returned. That she had been was evident, because the pot was boiling over the fire, the frying-pan had been scoured, and the interior tidied. Was she waiting until he sent for her? One or two of the Sherratt children, dirty as ever, were peering into his tent.

“Have you seen Mary James?” he asked them.

“No,” they answered.

He ate his supper, and then got up and went out restlessly. Her withdrawal had made his intended course of behaviour impossible. He had expected to find her ready for him as she had been found ready every other evening, and he had rehearsed his self-denial.

But she was not here, and he forgot the self-denial and was only impatient that she had not come. Spring was at the very door of the tent. Outside the little structure he stood for a moment, still and listening. The birds had sung madly all day, the larks with their breasts to the blue, the thrushes and blackbirds, the robins and the chaffinches in the hedges and hollies not far from the nests which held their joy. But now all the world was silent, listening with him. The evening was full of that subtle excitement, that spirit of youth which he and Mary had confessed to each other weeks ago, when they had sat at the wood's edge that warm February day. Now it was intensified. It urged him, it freed him, it made him reckless, it made him conscious of the essentials which most men miss. Once, at least, every year, spring comes to the heart and whispers, "Break your shackles—there is only one spring, did you but know it." He felt that he needed to be off, towards the world's end—but not alone. He wanted Mary, the incarnation of the forest, with him—to journey into all the forests of the earth—not the tropical forests, but forests which knew rain, which knew frosts that they might rejoice in spring; forests, where there could be the eternal incense of fires kindled by vagrant hands.

The gorse filled the air with its warm scent as of cocoanut groves. The air was full of it. A hawthorn near by, growing out of the thick of the hollies, was already showing clusters that looked as though the may, usually so dilatory, would be in bloom by May Day. Then his eye caught something white in the bush beside it. It was a strip of rag. He remembered suddenly that Mary had on one occasion shown him the way in which her people indicated to their comrades the way they had taken if chance had divided them on

the road. The sign was of twigs, or stones, or leaves, or paper placed on the path or wayside in a manner which would point the direction. He approached the bush—yes, the ends of the rag were secured to the holly leaves by pin-thorns. The rag pointed east and west—east to the burnt holms, west to the road and the village. He understood. She had chosen this shy, furtive way of telling him that she would await him at the spot where they had sat the night before.

He set off, walking swiftly. He went through the prickly ways towards the arm of bog, threading his way through hollies and gorse and heather, not yet so impenetrable as when the bracken should have grown. He was right, she was there, he saw her coloured headkerchief moving behind a clump of gorse.

She stood still, her face turned towards him, expectant and yet not moving.

“You meant me to come?” he said, taking both her hands.

“Yes—I put the pattrin there for you. If you hadn’t wanted to come, you needn’t have. But I wished you to come. I wished it hard.”

The glow had died out of her face to-day. She was passive, more lifeless than he had seen her. She gave a hasty glance about her.

“Let’s get away out of yer,” she said.

“Why?”

“Allus seen you an’ me last night.”

He reddened.

“She seen you kiss me,” said Mary in a level voice.

“Did she tell her mother?”

“Not yet. But she can’t kip her mouth shut.”

“Would it do any good if I spoke to her?”

“Not a scrap.”

“The little devil!”

"She don't mean no harm, she's on'y a chavi. Mischievous, she is."

His face darkened. The fact that they had been seen, vulgarised the affair.

"I wish we was back in Verely," she said passionately. "I hates Tharneyhill. There's no peace here. I likes the trees, and the quiet."

They made their way along the heather path to the north, where the hollies and gorse grew denser. The peewits flew up at their approach, crying peevishly. Up on the hill was the blackened ruin of yesterday's fire.

"Look!" said Mary, pointing to their feet. A patch of blue shone there—dog-violets growing together thickly.

He stooped to pick them.

"No, don't pick they," she said, putting her hand on his arm. "They're pretty, but it's not lucky to pick them. They're deceitful. The sweet ones is all right, but the dog-vi'lets deceitful."

He looked at her.

"Did you put witchcraft upon me to bring me to-night, Mary?"

"No," she said simply. "I just wanted you." There was a catch in her throat.

"Sit down," he ordered her. "I want to talk to you. Sit on the violets. We are going to put deceit beneath us—so it will be symbolical."

She sat down obediently, and he opposite to her.

"How old are you?" he said, looking into her eyes, which were partly wet with tears.

"Sixteen—no, seventeen," she said, with a little choke and a smile. "Dad can't never remember my birthday. But he thinks it was somewheres in the spring."

"And I'm thirty-two."

She looked a little frightened, and he pulled one of her hands into his and put it on his knee.

"Mary, dear, we've got such a lot to talk out."

"Don't see what there is to talk about," said she, with the same wild animal look of alarm.

"Yes, there is. I don't want us to blind ourselves. It is very difficult not to do that when we want each other as you and I want each other. I don't wish to make you unhappy. I don't wish to make myself unhappy either."

"No," said Mary, her eyes still widened as if in apprehension of what was coming, her hand making a movement of escape.

"Listen." He held the hand firmly. "You and I are at cross-roads. We must either go in separate directions, or together. We've got to think it out. Your people and mine are as far apart as sea and land. Mine are house-dwellers, church-goers, citizens, respectable, middle-class law-abiders. I don't happen to be, but that is beside the question for the minute. Yours have disliked houses, despised property which was not movable, and wandered from century to century, hating everything which mine prized. Your people are of another race. There is different blood in us."

"I knows that," said Mary, half-understanding. "Gypsy blood ain't gaujo blood. In the old times my folks wouldn't have nothin' to do with gaujo blood. But now we're none of us like that. There ain't no pure bloods left now."

"Yet," said Lyddon, "you and I have come together somehow, because we are male and female as much as for any reason, and because it is spring-time, and—hang it, because you and I have a good deal in common. I am in love with you, and because I am in love with you, the trees mean you, the wind means you, the wood

smoke means you, the furze blossom means you; and I can't sleep for remembering your kisses and your hands and your kind, pretty eyes, and your little silver rings and all the other phenomena which, taken together, mean Mary."

She made no answer.

"But there will be difference of blood between us. There will be qualities, instincts in me in which you will have no part; there'll be that in you which I shall not understand, and that will make us strange to each other; there will be times when you will feel horribly lonely and misunderstood, and times when I must feel the same. Behind you are your grandfather and great-grandfather and all those dark people of yours which wandered into England centuries ago. Behind me are parsons, and small squires, and soldiers, and city magnates."

"Are you tellin' me you don't want to marry me?" said Mary. "I knows that. Besides, you're married a'ready."

The tears dried in her eyes. "I told you yesterday I didn't care. What do all that matter?"

"It has got to be considered, if we get married."

She turned upon him quickly.

"Adam! What are you sayin'!"

"I mean it," he said recklessly. "There isn't any other way out, that I can see. You and I will marry, and we shall have nice, brown children and a cart to stow them in, and we will travel over every road that ever was made, and keep clear of towns and people we dislike. When we want to stop, we'll stop, when we want to go on, we'll go on."

"You're talkin' as if you was divvy," said she, half-laughing, half-crying.

"I tell you what, one day we'll go to Rumania. There are people of yours there, and gorgeous country."

"And where's the money to come from?" she asked.

"That's more that I've got to tell you. My wife is dead."

She looked at him incredulously.

"You're laughing at me, Adam."

"I swear it's true. I heard yesterday. Another thing, I am not Adam Allward. My name is Lyddon."

She was silent a moment. Then she said, "I likes Adam best. I'm sorry you're not Adam Allward. Then the gavengros isn't after you?"

"Not as a criminal."

"Then that was all a fake? You hokkanied the lot of us."

"Yes."

"But why was you lyin' by the road like that?"

"I got a moment of disgust, a frenzy of sickness at the whole thing. I was sick of lawyers and scenes and beastliness. I was sorry for my wife. Things were at a dead end. I hated being the successful man. I hated London. I saw suddenly that I had been doing the things which tied me down consistently for years. I meant to go down to Bournemouth for the week-end. And I saw the Forest, and jumped on a mad impulse. I couldn't tell you why. It was a momentary madness. I'd been sleeping badly. The thing was going so fast, I had an uncontrollable desire to leap out, just while it was dashing along—jump out into the woods. It came as an idea at first, then something said, 'Do it! do it!'"

"Then that money you gave dad——"

"I have plenty. Enough to keep us, that is."

"You shouldn't have telled me all that about you not bein' Allward," she said slowly. "It makes it different, look."

"Why does it make it different?"

"You tellin' me huckabens all along, like that."

"Mary—I'm telling you the truth now."

"How'm I to know when you're tellin' truth?" she said sombrely.

He was surprised. He had never thought to chill her by his disclosure. The news that his wife was dead seemed to her less vital than the fact that he was not the malefactor she had thought him.

"Look at me!" he said. "Can't you see that I'm truthful?"

"I can't tell anythink," she said. Her voice shook. "What d'you want to do with me?" she said.

He took her wrists and dragged her close.

"I've told you," he said. "I want to take you away, to have you for mine."

"I'll come with you," she said, and struggled slightly as he held her and kissed her. Then she put both her arms about his neck and held him a little away from her. "When'll we go?" she asked tensely.

"As soon as they will marry us."

She shook herself free, and gave a laugh that was near tears.

"I telled you yesterday no good 'ud come of me an' you marryin'. You'd always be kind to me, I knows, but some day it would be a kindness that would hurt worse'n if you was to take a kosht and beat me. What should I do, playin' the rawnie alongside of you?"

"You wouldn't be playing the raunie. We should live much as we've been living now, except that we should be together."

"There you are," said Mary, sighing. "If I did marry you, look, I'd like to go to the races in white gloves with a pretty dress on and joolry and that, in one of them coaches. I'd like to live in a swell van, painted beautiful. I'd like to treat them all at the fairs,

and to be the Romany rawnie with fine fawnies on my fingers. And you're not that sort."

"Neither are you. You love the quiet camping-places, and the tent and the roads."

"Yes, an' I loves the other too. There'd be times when I'd want to dance and ker peeass with the others, look."

"But I've been telling you that. As for the races, you shall go to them as you like."

"I can't," she said, after a silence.

"You would come away with me, without being married."

"Yes," she said, under her breath.

"You don't know what you are saying."

"I do! I do! There's no man I'd go with but you. I'd be true and faithful to you like as if we was married."

"You said the other day that your folk weren't like the mumpers, that——"

"I knows," said Mary, flushing. "They'll scarn me."

"Then, dearest——"

"I'd sooner be scorned by them all, than hated by you. You'd hate me one day if you married me, look."

"I should hate myself if I didn't," he said passionately, angry with himself, angry with her. Her very resistance of him made him forget that he had ever thought of anything but marriage with her.

"What'll you do?" she asked timidly, after a long pause.

"I don't know. I've got to think."

She gave him one of her sweet, illuminating smiles, and put her hand on his.

"Adam, dear——"

“ Well——”

“ I loves you more’n ever for wantin’ to marry me. Don’t you see it’s because I loves you—more’n that what aunt and they’ll call me, more’n that I care what happens to me? ”

“ It is out of pride, you strange, little witch——”

She was in his arms.

“ I must goo,” she said at last.

“ And to-morrow? ”

CHAPTER XV

THE sanitary inspector had come, and the word went round among the squatters that the "boro yooi mush" had arrived, and was in the brick valley on his way to the hollies. In the twinkling of an eye those children whose cleanliness of hair and person would not bear inspection were hustled off to hide in the bushes, and by the time that the inspector reached the camp in question, he found only the mother or grandmother sitting alone in the tent, innocent and loquacious. She didn't know where the chavis had gone, no, not she—but they was as clean as soap and water could make them, though to buy a bar of soap meant money wanted bad for bread to fill their mouths, the Lord knew!

And hidden securely in thickets and bushes the touzle-headed, filthy children, as healthy as life in the open could make them, listened and grinned until a cautious cry told them that the coast was clear and the boro yooi mush had passed on.

But Charlotte Cooper, an elderly half-and-half gypsy who had fallen on evil days, was serene. She had expected a farmer's daughter who wished to have her fortune told, and her granddaughter Elsie, a girl of nine, was clad in a clean print dress, her face well scrubbed. When Charlotte had a drinking bout, Elsie was neglected; when she was sober again, the child was washed. Charlotte was young still, and her body as healthy as though she never touched alcohol. She was a woman of such cleverness that although she had a past which embraced several husbands—so-called—she could go

where she pleased and yet never find any traveller or villager in the Forest to miscall or slight her. Her daughters, Britannia and Victoria, had been brought up sternly and strictly and had married early. Her sons were afraid of her, and contributed to her support from time to time. In spite of that, and her extraordinary faculty for drawing money from those she "dukkered" or begged from she appeared to be poor, and when she moved from camp to camp or up to the strawberry-fields she bore her tent and worldly possessions on her back, with the aid of her orphaned granddaughter. Some said she had money hidden in the earth, some that she spent all she had on drinking bouts; but be that as it may, Charlotte remained in poverty. She was well made and had blue eyes, keen as a hawk's; her hair was scarcely grey. The secret of her power lay in the fact that she was said to be a witch. People in Thorneyhill spoke in lowered voices of her, and were afraid to refuse her. They pointed out a woman who had been bewitched by her, and had never been the same since. Unlike many of the gypsies and hawker folk, Charlotte could read and write, and this added to her prestige; also the fact that, especially when in drink, she could *rokker*, or talk Romany, so deep that few could understand her, in addition to a gibberish which some said was "Injun" and some the talk "she'd picked up from furriners."

She was difficult to understand even in English, for she spoke darkly and rapidly, dealt in hidden meanings and parables, and if she wished, invented words and phrases intended to mystify her hearer.

The inspector, honest man, was not afraid of her, but he had a sense of humour, and Charlotte knew it, and she made it her business to retail caustic anecdotes and entertain him with the gossip of the village

for a while so as to wheedle tobacco out of him for her blackened pipe. Elsie stood by with her freckled face all smiling. Her father, Charlotte's son, had married a Scotch tinker woman in the hop-fields, and she showed her Gentile blood in her sandy hair and broad cheek-bones.

The tobacco was forthcoming, the boro yooi mush went on his way, and Charlotte thanked her stars that he had not made his visit the week before. She was safe for some time, and in a good temper, which even the failure of the farmer's daughter to appear for the promised fortune-telling did not abate. She sent Elsie off into the village for half-a-pound of tea and a loaf, and sat by herself in the tent of rags and patches she owned, smoking and chuckling to herself.

There was a step outside.

The old woman assumed a listening attitude, her eyes hardened with attention.

"Come in, come in!" she said. "That's no gaujo step I hears—come in, Mary James, and besh alay. I've bin expectin' of you for three nights."

Mary hesitated. Charlotte Cooper was looked down upon with scorn by her respectable aunts, though they took care not to offend her. Charlotte had lost caste, she ruled by fear, she had the taint of the gaol on her.

"Come in, my darling," said Charlotte. "Elsie's gone up to the buddiga a minute; you couldn't have chosen a better time. The boro yooi mush was just here, and a fine talk we've bin havin'. Your name was mentioned, my darling. 'Who's this that Mary James have took up with?' says he. 'Is it a rye?' says he; 'I always comes to you, Charlotte, for gossip,' says he, laughin'. 'I knows nothin' of Mary James's business,' says I. 'I never opens me mouth on other people's

business,' says I. 'If I did, people'd call me a fool instid of the old chovihaun,' says I."

She patted her closed lips. "That's what gets most folks into trouble, Mary James. Don't you fergit it." With that she made a Rabelaisian allusion in Romany, but the joke was so worn that she did not wait for applause. "Have a bit of tobacco," she added in the same tongue.

Mary accepted, and began to roll herself a cigarette.

"What you come and see me about?" asked Charlotte suddenly, leaning forward and fixing her keen blue eyes on Mary's. "You can't tell me you haven't come to see me. I've heard you comin' this three evenin's, with a question on your lips. Is it about that rye that loves you? D'you want the old chovihaun to dukker you?"

Mary's lips were dry. The woman wore her most terrifying expression. Was she about to be cursed? Charlotte began to talk to herself in the language that was neither Romany nor English, and Mary sat still, half wishing that her legs would carry her from the tent, but certain that with those uncanny blue eyes upon her she would not have the power to move.

"What'll you give me if I dukker you?"

Mary reached in her skirt for a leather purse, but the witch put out her hand and stopped her roughly. "I don't take money from dark blood," she said. "I takes money from the gaujos, but no money from own kin. I gives lies to the gaujos, but to you, my girl, I shall give the true dookeriben, the Romany sorcery, like your granny used to make."

"Is it by cards?" said Mary, finding her tongue at length.

"By cards!" Charlotte Cooper screamed, and fixed her again with her eyes. "A fine wicked old chovi-

haun you think I am! Cards! Kekker, my chai! The Devil's work they are. You'd like the Devil to come and take me, I'll lay. Never you touch cards! My poor sister Leah, that died afore ever you was born, she dukkered with cards, and fine she wished she'd never touched them when she lay dying over against Beaulieu Rails. Nobody was with her but me, and off I sent for the parson. 'Come quick; my only sister is dyin',' I says, 'and she *can't go*. Fightin' and strugglin' she is,' I says, 'but she can't go.' He come with me, and so soon as he puts his nose inside the tan, 'I smell sulphur,' he says. 'Sulphur!' There it was, and she lyin' there in the tan fightin' with somethin'! 'Charlotte,' she says to me, 'fetch me rings, and me brooches, and me bangles, and wooser them into the fire!' Fine fawnies she had, too, my darling, beautiful silver fawnies, thick and precious. Into the fire I throws them, every one. 'Throw in my clothes,' says she. Into the yog they goes, and a fine smoke they made. There she was, still fightin', and the parson sat there, frightened he was, but not a prayer could he get out. Then I fetches out the cards. She screams horrible. 'In they goes,' I said, and in I puts them. One flies away. It was the Ass of Spades. 'Here's de little gentleman what's bin the ruin of you,' I says, and holds him up. 'In goes my black gentleman into the yog.' "

Charlotte came to a pause, dramatic, her blue eyes filled with white fire.

Mary listened, transfixed with horror.

"That was what did it, my darling. She cried for joy. 'I sees heaven,' she says, and up she gets, and into her shoes, and begins to dance. She died happy. . . . Ah, don't you never dukker with cards, my darling; it's the Beng—and you and I know who that is, don't we, my Romany rakli? "

"I won't be dukkered at all," said Mary, finding her husky young voice.

"Oh yes, you will, my darling. You will be dukkered, because you want to know what will become of you and that boro rye of yourn. I seen you in his arms—no, you needn't look like that; I'd no call to move from this yer old tan of mine to see what you bin doin'. You need a lil; you need a bit of paper what's goin' to bring you love and diments, an' chavis and a gold ring."

"I don't want to have no gold ring," said Mary under her breath.

"Yes, you do, chai, you do. You don't want'er be scarned and disclaimed by every one. You don't want them to call you lubbeny. You don't want 'em to say behind their hands, 'There's a rakli what ties up to any bush.' You'se proud, my dearie, and it's pride that's standin' in your way. Your mother's folk was always proud."

Mary's soft brown eyes were as frightened as a deer's. She let the witch-woman take her hands. Charlotte glanced at them, but kept her gaze fixed on the young girl's face.

"There's adders on your path, my darling," she said in a low, hoarse voice. "You needs a lil to protect yourself. I'll make you one. A bit of silver I needs for that, not because I wants your money for I'll dukker you for nothin', but silver is moon's colour, and helps it to work. A tringrush, a shilling, will work it, my darling." Her gimlet eyes watched the girl's hand into her skirt and the silver piece extracted from the leather purse. She received the shilling, spat upon it, and transferred it to her own ragged skirt. "It's not for dukkerin' you, but for the lil," she repeated, and again she gazed at the girl's hands and face.

"There's one adder you never seen yet. It's a

woman. She's hidin'. It's a gauji woman. You remember that, my darling, and step out of her path. You'se barn to be rich and lucky, a raunie you'll be, my darlin', with diments on your fingers. You'll step into dead folks' shoes, my dearie, see if you don't and they'll carry you over many a drum (road). There's some trouble afore you, but if you listens to me and carries about the lil I'll make you, you can come through it all, and have a smilin' face at the end. You'll never be content with the crabtree while the orchard's afore you. Don't you go pickin' the crabs, my darling. Yes, there's trouble black afore you, but I think your luck'll carry you through."

Her eyes clouded over, as if with a mist, and she began some of her gibberish again. Mary began to draw her hands away again, but they were clutched tight.

"Do you see me through the trouble, Charlotte?" she asked.

The fingers round hers relaxed, and Charlotte's eyes became bright again.

"You shouldn't have spoke," she said. "I was just goin' to see somethin' for you. Now it's gone. I can't tell you what the end of it'll be, but I'll do my best for you. I'll bring you the lil to-morrow."

"Don't you let aunt see," said Mary.

"Kekker, chai. Do you think the old chovihaun's a dinn? I don't know if you'll see me either. There's ways——" Her light blue eyes gleamed mysteriously. Then she asked abruptly—

"You goin' up country this year?"

"I don't know," said Mary.

"You'll stay with that rye of yourn, perhaps."

Mary flushed. "I don't know," she said.

"Don't you fear, my darling, I'm not goin' to open

my mouth. There was a rye after me once. Crazy for me, he was. Gold and diments he flung at me, and never onst got a choomer."

Mary gazed at her. There were tales of a tragedy in Charlotte's early life. Her escapades and sinister reputation had all come after the untimely death of her first husband, to whom she had been faithful; her only legitimate spouse, as gossip had it.

But Elsie was heard approaching through the bushes, and Mary leapt up. She did not want it known that she had visited Charlotte Cooper, and she knew that she could rely on the witch's silence. She disappeared round the bushes before the child's broad, freckled face was in sight.

CHAPTER XVI

LYDDON came back to the tent the next day, which was the day upon which Mary had paid her visit to Charlotte Cooper, to hear the sound of singing. He guessed it to be Mary's voice, though she was always shy of letting him hear her sing. It was a sweet voice, a little husky like her speaking voice, and the tune she sang to was minor. He came near, moving carefully. He had missed the earlier verses evidently, for this was what she was singing—

“When she reached by his bedside,
She said, ‘Young man, you’re dyin’,’
And when she reached by his bedside,
She said, ‘Young man, you’re dyin’.’

‘You look all at my feet,
You see a basin standin’
With one clear pint of my own heart’s blood
Which I shed for you, Barbara Helen,
With one clear pint of my own heart’s blood
Which I shed for you, Barbara Helen.

And you look all at my head,
You’ll see a watch a-hangin’,
It’s a silver watch with a golden chain,
It’s for you, dear Barbara Helen.
It’s a silver watch with a golden chain,
It’s for you, dear Barbara Helen.’

The more she looked, the more she laughed,
The further she drewed from him,
And all the people cried, ‘For shame,
Hard-hearted Barbara Helen, Helen,’
And all the people cried, ‘For shame,
Hard-hearted Barbara Helen.’

As I was goin' across the fields,
The bells struck out a-tollin',
And all the tune they seemed to say,
'Hard-hearted Barbara Helen, Helen.'
And all the tune they seemed to say,
'Hard-hearted Barbara Helen.'
She hadn't got a mile or two
She saw the corpse a-comin'.
'You put him down, my four young men,
That I may gaze upon him.
You put him down, my four young men,
That I may gaze upon him.

You go home and make my bed,
And make it long and narrow,
My true love died for me to-day,
I'll die for him to-morrow.
My true love died for me to-day,
I'll die for him to-morrow.'"

He came to the entrance of the tent, and saw the reason of her singing. In her arms she held a black-haired baby, who stirred and half opened sleepy eyes at her sudden movement when she saw Lyddon.

"Ssh!" went her lips, in warning to Lyddon, and she rocked gently backwards and forwards as she sat on the ground until the infant was fast asleep. Then she laid him down on Lyddon's bed, and threw some sausages into the pan.

He entered in some embarrassment. It was the first time that she had come into his tent since the day of the hollies.

"It's awright," said Mary. "He's off now, and when he's off he'd sleep through anythink."

"Whose baby is it?"

"Prissy's. She've got a place in her breast, and the doctor have told her she's to wean him. I just given him his bottle—there it is!" She jerked over her shoulder, as she was holding the frying-pan in one hand and a fork in the other. "I promised Prissy

I'd look after him while she was out. I brought him here, so's I could do your supper."

Her tone was so cool and matter-of-fact that it forbade any tenderness.

"I thought you weren't ever coming again," he said.

"Well, you thought stupid."

He was puzzled at her deliberate roughness. Was it to counterbalance her coming to the tent, the instinctive withdrawal which follows an advance with a woman?

He put his hand in his pocket.

"I am glad you came," said he. "Because, unless you had laid a patrin outside here, I shouldn't have been able to see you alone to-night. I had a parcel from London to-day."

He took out a small packet.

"I sent to my bankers for this."

She looked at it curiously, and turned the sausages over with the fork.

"I am not going to give it to you till after supper."

"I can't bide for supper. I got to get the baby back."

He made no rejoinder, but sat fingering the packet and looking into the fire. She was child enough to let her curiosity overcome her, mingled with a little shame for having treated him so cavalierly.

"What is it, Adam?"

"When the sausages are finished you can come and see."

"They'se brown enough now."

She forked them on to a dish and set it down beside her.

He pushed them aside.

"That's where I want you to sit."

She surrendered impulsively, and, seating herself beside him, flung her arms round his neck.

"Oh, my dear! Oh, my mush! I do love you. I koms you, I koms you. I don't think of nuthink else all the dear blessed day but you. It's made a fool of me."

Again the dizzying moment, again the madness of meeting lips and cheeks laid against each other, again the wild foolishness of lovers' talk.

At last, partially sobered, she withdrew herself. "What's the little parcel, Adam?"

"Something for you, my dearest."

She opened it with fingers which still trembled with happy emotion. Within was a little wooden box, and within that, again, a small leather case. She opened it. Within were two rings. One flashed and glittered like dew on an August morning, and she pounced on that first.

"A fawnie! Oh, Adam, ain't it pretty! My dear Lord, how it do shine! They're not real ones, the tatcho bars?"

Her tone was almost awed.

"Yes, they're real diamonds. It was my mother's ring, and her mother's before her. I want you to wear it and keep it."

Her arms were about his neck again, half laughing and crying. "Oh, Adam! Oh, you blessed dinnlo mush! Oh, my dear! You mustn't be givin' me your lady mother's ring."

"There's no one in the world I want to wear it more."

"And what would the folks say when they saw a traveller girl like me with diments on her finger? The gavmushes would be wantin' to lel me." She turned and slipped it on her brown hand, turning it this way

and that, so that the stones glittered and sparkled. It did look incongruous on her brown hand beside the silver rings, and yet he liked to see it there.

"It do look lovely," she sighed, enamoured of it.

"Then keep it, darling."

"I can't."

"Because I ask you. Just to wear the finger smooth for this one." He took her hand and transferred the ring to her left hand, and then laid the other ring on her palm.

It was of plain gold.

"It's a marriage ring," said Mary huskily.

"It is to wear beside this when we are married."

"I've told you that marry you I won't."

"But you are going to, all the same. Even if I have to carry you to church by force, the same as Prissy was taken to her man's tent."

Her eyes were veiled behind the lids for the moment, and she flushed. The idea of force appealed to something that was primitive in her.

But he made the mistake of pleading again.

"Mary, you will?"

"I can't."

"Then you are afraid that you won't care for me always."

"You know it isn't that," she said passionately. "I shall never think of nobody but you."

"Then you *shall* marry me if you want to or not."

This was better. The temptation was stronger than she could bear.

She sat still, looking idly at her hands.

"When, when?" he said, gripping them.

A big tear splashed down on his hand, and then she looked up at him with smiling, swimming eyes.

"You does what you likes with me, Adam."

"I mean to, you gypsy thief."

"Who're you calling names?" she said, with April laughter.

"Who but you, my wife to be, you Romany witch, you wild rabbit?"

"That's the first time I ever yeerd a man call his girl a shushy by way of a love-name," said she, leaning against him. "You'll be killin' and eatin' me next."

"I have snared you."

"That you have, Adam. No more jumpin' in the fuzz-bushes for this yer brown rabbit."

He had a sudden unreasonable remembrance of the rabbit he had once seen in her hand, and of the blood-stains she had wiped away with her apron.

"There's something you haven't answered," he said. "How soon shall we get married? I can get a special license, if you like, to-morrow."

"No, no. That's too awful quick. Not yet, Adam."

"I want to bind you down to something."

"My word is bond enough."

"You give it?"

"On my daddy's hand. That's oath enough."

"Will you tell your aunt?"

She reflected a moment.

"Where's the need to tell anybody?"

"Because I want to see you without fear of anybody finding anything to talk about."

"They's always talk, never fear. Where's the need to be so public? That's the way with you, a dibli wast at every drum."

"What's that?"

"A sign-post at every road, my gaujo rye."

"No, only at the cross-roads. And this is where our roads meet. The sign-post has got to go up."

"'Tis my daddy as you'll have to ask. Wait a bit,

Adam. He's comin' soon, and we're goin' to camp up at Verely. Now I must go, or Priss'll think I've mored her baby."

She turned over the diamond ring.

"I can't wear this, Adam. Yes, I knows what I can do." She unbuttoned her bodice slightly, put in her hand and drew out a small packet, fastened round her throat by a piece of red ribbon. "I'll tie it up with this."

"What is it?"

She flushed. "Nothin'."

"Show it to me, then, if it's nothing."

"I can't."

"Why not, Mary?"

"I'd not like you to see it."

He was insistent, laid hands on it, and kissed the bare throat she had exposed.

"You'll laugh at mandy."

"Kekker, my darling," he swore in the Romany negative.

"It's a bit of a lil," she said shamefacedly, putting it into his hands.

He spread open a piece of paper pricked with a pin into various designs. There were arrows, symmetrical figures, lines of prickings which seemed without design.

"What is it?"

"A paper."

"It doesn't take much to see that."

"'Tis to charm the adders away and bring me good luck," she said reluctantly.

"Who gave it to you?"

"The person what made it." She wrapped up the ring carefully in the paper, tied it up, and placed the red ribbon about her neck again, refastening her bodice.

“And will that ward off ill luck?”

“If you wears it next your heart,” she said. “I don’t know as I believes all that rubbish. But if there’s somethink in it, there’s no harm in wearin’ a bit of a lil, now is there?”

“Then my ring is next your heart, too?”

“And you’re inside it,” she said. “Right inside of it you are, and fillin’ it right up.”

Her eyes shone with love at him and her mouth was tender. In another minute she and the baby, which was slung in a shawl, had disappeared.

He stood still a moment, as if she were still gathered close to him, and the smoky, wood-sweet smell of her in his nostrils. Then he turned in and almost trod upon a plate of cold and forgotten sausages.

“Good Lord!” said he, sighing deeply.

And he ate them with a hearty appetite.

CHAPTER XVII

ELEANOR HINTON was deposited at Cloudy Gate early on the appointed Sunday afternoon. She left her aunt in the motor, which proceeded on its way to Brockenhurst, and pushing open the little gate, went up between high hedges of box to the porch of the house, which faced a square lawn surrounded by flower-beds. Rain had fallen at intervals all day, but now transitory sunshine was drawing all the sweetness from the wet earth. A big tree of red may beside the house sent out its fresh, suggestive perfume. A thrush, which fled from it at Eleanor's approach, turned to hop on the gravel path and inspect her with bright, hard eyes, as she waited for the maid to answer the door. Evidently this was a house where birds had nothing to fear.

The door opened, the elderly maid smiled down at her.

"Will you come in, miss? Miss Price is down by the van. I'll tell her you've come."

"And how are you, Broomfield? No more lumbago, I hope?"

Eleanor had the gift of pleasantness which endeared her to her friends' servants. She always appeared to have an interest in their health and well-being which, if not wholly sincere, sprang out of a genuine desire to please.

"No, thank-you, miss. I hope you are quite well."

Eleanor followed the maid into the drawing-room.

"Miss Price will be here directly," said Broomfield, shutting the door.

Eleanor went to the looking-glass over the mantel-piece and gently rubbed her cheeks with a piece of chamois leather. She prided herself on not using artificial aids to her natural good looks, indeed her skin needed none, though, as is the way with fine skins, little lines were beginning to show about the corners of her mouth and about her eyes. Since early girlhood she had had some grey hairs, scarcely distinguishable among her light-brown hair, almost golden but for its lack of lustre. Good features, attractive, intelligent and sympathetic grey eyes, whose lashes were a little too light; a well-shaped mouth set in sensitive lines, such was the reflection she saw in the glass. Not quite young, but so soft and small-boned, that she was not old enough to lose—in England—the appellation of “girl.” A little too thin, perhaps, for beauty, in spite of her good carriage, yet the impression she gave most people was one of appealing, almost childish, prettiness.

Miss Price, the inevitable rush-hat on her untidy hair, came in, followed by a large, grey, half-breed Persian cat.

“So sorry to keep you waiting, my dear; I was taking a nap in the van in the field after lunch and over-slept myself. It was the sermon this morning. I do think that parsons should restrict themselves to ten minutes. An alarm-clock in the pulpit would do it. I’m so glad you’ve come in good time, we shall be able to have a little talk to ourselves. You know I’ve to go out and leave my carpenter to your tender mercies at tea-time. How nice you look in that shady hat and pretty dress! But you always look as if you were going to sit to Lavery, or one of these people. Come upstairs and take off your things.”

“I think I’ll keep my hat on, thank-you. You dear thing, it is nice to see you.”

"Yes, the hat is too becoming to take off. *I* know. You mean to upset the peace of my carpenter."

"And who——"

"Oh, my dear, whom are you coming to meet?"

"Richard Lyddon."

"Well, and he's been working here by the day—sawing and planking at my new coach-house. You knew that, didn't you?"

"No. I haven't seen him yet, you know."

"He's living like a tramp down here. Took me in. I thought he was a broken-down gentleman. Great, healthy, red-haired creature, too. Shy! Queer! Gave himself out as an artist."

"Richard is a dear."

"I quite like him."

"Then he must like you. He's dreadfully unsociable with people he doesn't care about. He sticks out all over like a porcupine."

"He has been fairly porcupiny with me sometimes. I am so inquisitive. But there is something about him, something very simple and sincere, that one can't help liking."

"Yes," said Eleanor, and there was something possessive in the way she lapped up praise of her friend.

"Do you know what our nickname for him was in the old days? The Wandering Jew. He used to be lost periodically—lost to the world, I mean, not lost himself. I believe he could make a map from memory of most of the western counties, he told me he could, once. He knows Dartmoor and Exmoor better than the people who've lived there for generations; exactly where the bogs are, all the foot-paths and the rights of way through private property all round about. He is extraordinary, in these days of indoor men, the miserable creatures."

"And women."

"It's natural for women to be indoor. I am not, though."

"I know you say so. But you live in London—by choice. You're one of the people who only like the country under town conditions."

"Oh, Miss Price! How can you! Why, you know I spent the whole of last summer on Poole Harbour, and slept under canvas, and did my own cooking, and walked for miles."

"Yes, my dear, but you wore sandals and had silk cushions in your tent."

"You darling, silly thing, why shouldn't one be comfortable when one is camping?"

"And there were too many intense young creatures walking about with one garment on them and their hair down in that camp to please me," said Miss Price. "And a young man who promenaded the place in bathing-costume and spouted poetry and flirted with all those girls."

"Oh, Guy! No one takes him seriously. But it was glorious! I swam out every morning for about two miles and back, and got brown as a gypsy. And you talk as if Mr. Rochester had been the only man—there were three others."

"Not such poseurs, I hope."

"Far too busy. One was an artist, another went fishing all day, and the third was Molly Reynolds' brother, a gunner, you know, a very nice boy."

"It sounds artificial, the whole thing."

"You are perverse," said Eleanor. "I was dreadfully unhappy, and that time on Poole Harbour pulled me together. Don't let's talk of it."

"We'll talk of Mr. Lyddon," said Miss Price.

"What I don't understand in him is where the scientist comes in."

"He is a living paradox," said Eleanor. "Part of him is intensely modern—inquiring, inventive, practical. The other half is retrogressive, shy, unpractical."

"How do you reconcile the two? Is it a case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde?"

"I think when he is working he becomes absorbed by work, but that its actual results and its commercial significance embarrass him. Then he is good-natured and lets himself be drawn into situations which afterwards fetter and irritate him. On the other hand, he can be excessively perverse."

"I believe you mean to marry him," said Miss Price.

"I should like to," said Eleanor frankly.

She flushed a little as she spoke, and gazed with a certain challenge into the elder woman's eyes.

"Well, he is free now," said Miss Price dryly.

"Tell me," said Eleanor, putting her hand on her friend. "You didn't believe that there was anything in—in what Marjorie said about us?"

"My dear, it is difficult to say whether one believes a thing or not, nowadays. So many nice women do incredible things, so many incredible women do nice things. In my old age I simply accept things."

"Then you did believe it?"

"I didn't think it improbable. Platonic friendship——"

"It wasn't with me," said Eleanor, keeping her eyes down, "I am not going to pretend that it was. But he never thought that—I mean that he hadn't the least idea. Marjorie had. She saw. But he blundered on, just thinking we were nothing more than friends." She lifted her eyes again and gave a little laugh, though her lips were set. "Men are so blind."

"Poor Eleanor!" said Miss Price sardonically.

"I was foolish. I wanted to make him care, somehow, to show if there weren't some spark. It wasn't as if he cared for Marjorie. They were as far apart as the poles. I started a silly love affair to make him jealous partly, and to—— Oh, I don't know, when one is hopelessly in love with one man one often tries to fall in love with some one else. I made him my confidant—Richard, I mean. Then Marjorie found a letter I'd written to the other man—and kept it. She thought it was for Richard. That was the letter which nearly came up in the trial."

"Oh," said Miss Price. She looked at Eleanor. "My dear, you are telling me all this in order to make me into an ally—to tie my hands if I weren't."

"I have never told any one but you."

"I should like to ask you one thing? Do you think that it is possible that Richard Lyddon cared for you, but was too honourable to show it?"

"He has always cared for me as a friend, and once——"

"You were engaged to each other once."

"Yes."

"And you were responsible for breaking it off?"

"How could we marry? We hadn't a penny piece between us."

"Eleanor, you are a dangerous little creature, and I disapprove of you, but I've an affection for you. Be honest with me. You are really in love with your big, queer man?"

"Yes," said Eleanor Hinton, with simplicity which was deliberate. "I am going to be frank with you. If I don't marry now, and marry a man I am really fond of, I shall get degenerate and nervy and towny

and all the things I see other women becoming. I can't marry for the sake of marrying, because I am fastidious. I care for Richard as I care for no one else."

"If he had been in love with you, or shown it while his wife was still alive, as you wanted him," said Miss Price grimly, "what would you have done?"

"Done? Why, nothing."

"And you would have lived on the satisfaction that he was as unhappy as yourself, I suppose."

"You think me selfish."

"My dear, I always have. You are feline. You like comfort and you won't risk your neck. Still, you are lovable, like my Shah here, and you are just as clever at getting what you want as he is."

The grey cat responded to her lean, brown, caressing hand with a powerful purr.

"Don't think me unkind," said Miss Price. "I think I shall help you. In fact I have begun already. I don't think you good enough for my carpenter, but I think that he'll be the salvation of you. And you have a good deal in you that makes you the woman for him. I hope you'll have seven children at least."

"I don't think," said Eleanor, "that I'd care for more than two at most."

"Your nicest trait," said Miss Price, "is that you can throw pose aside when you want to. There's a soul to save in you, my dear."

"I'm glad you think so," said Eleanor. "Tell me, at what time is he coming?"

"He'll be here in five minutes. I am going up to change and go off to the Parsonage. I shall not wait for Mr. Lyddon. Be kind to him and make my excuses."

She shook hands with Eleanor—Miss Price disliked

kissing, and left her. She was not to escape Lyddon, however, she met him at the foot of the stairs.

"Are you off?" he said disappointedly.

"I told you I was going to tea."

"Yes, but I hoped you would have put it off."

"My dear man, this anxiety to have me is flattering. But you and Eleanor have reached such an unromantic stage of friendship that chaperones can be dispensed with. She's in there, waiting to scold you."

Miss Price went upstairs.

"I wonder if Eleanor will succeed? I think she will." She felt a certain gleeful and malicious pleasure in thinking of Lyddon as the unsuspecting quarry and Eleanor as the crafty Diana. She felt the more pleasure, being uneasy about certain rumors in the village concerning Lyddon and Mary. She had strong opinions on the subject of misalliances, and liked both the gypsy and her eccentric protégé too much to see them involved in the net. Eleanor was the natural solution. She was intelligent, sympathetic, appreciative and attractive in the appealing way that most men liked. She looked delicate in spite of an excellent constitution, and seeming fragility should appeal to Lyddon's virility. She had poetry enough in her composition to understand Lyddon's passion for Nature; in fact, to a certain measure he shared it. There was no reason why it should not be the most suitable of marriages, if Lyddon were a marrying man.

Eleanor was amazed at the change of appearance in the big man who stood somewhat awkwardly within the door. Lyddon had put on a respectable suit for the occasion, but his face was browner, fuller and subtly changed. The harassed look, the look of a man who is fretted and strained, had left him.

"How are you, Eleanor?"

"Too surprised at you to speak. What have you done to yourself? You look so young."

"Young, do I? I've been camping out, you know."

"How like you—you mad old thing—to bolt out of London like that and begin to camp in the middle of winter. Where are you going to sit?"

He dropped into a chair at the opposite side of the tea-table, relieved that their conversation had begun in a bantering tone. The elderly maid brought in tea.

"This feels awfully civilised," he said, with a smile.

"Don't you think it's nice? I always love getting back to comfort and luxury after I've been camping."

"I forgot that you ever did," he replied. "I always think of you in drawing-rooms, looking pretty."

"And we've talked of things which are not a bit indoor. Do you remember that walking tour you marked out for me on the map? You know perfectly well that I camp out every year."

"In crowds—a sort of garden city and simple life business—I know," he said.

"Don't be ironical, Richard. You know I love the open air as much as you do."

"Possibly," he said.

"And what do you think of my Forest? Isn't it beautiful?" She leant forward with a thrill in her voice. "I've always told you about it, haven't I?—and now you will love it as you love your west country. Oh, the larks as I came along! And bog myrtle is beginning to come out! I've thought of you *so* often here and wished I could persuade you to come."

Something in her enthusiasm jarred upon him as shallow. In London, when she had talked to him of the Forest in this possessive strain, he had felt drawn to her. It was so rare to find any one who talked to him of the things that lay deep at his heart. But

now, close to the reality, her praise of the Forest made him retreat within himself, irritatedly, as if she had profaned the subject, or, rather, exhibited a patronising attitude towards it. She was so conscious of her appreciation. He was almost certain how her next sentence would begin, and he was right.

“Have you read——”

“I haven’t read a single book about this part of the world.”

“Then I must lend you a perfectly fascinating book. It tells you all about the Forest rights, and the local superstitions, and a hundred things that one wants to know. I always remember how you interested me one night about rights of way.”

His natural kindness and politeness made him thank her, and assume that he would be interested in reading the book. But he felt inwardly as if she felt all her delicate manner and fragile personality were intruding, as if the discussion of the Forest would be in a subtle way a discussion of Mary. He had a shrinking from anything that would interfere with an esoteric knowledge which he was only gaining through every day of his new existence. Since he had known Mary, it seemed to him that his intimacy with the things which were her life was identical with his intimacy with her. The vast dumb personality of the forest was in an occult way associated with her personality, and into it he, too, was becoming gradually absorbed. Mary was not conscious of beauty, as Eleanor was, she was part of it. She was part of the moor, part of the interchange of sun and shadow beneath the beech trees, part of the wind and cloud. He began to understand something of the vague hostility which those who are of wild blood feel towards the civilised.

To draw her away, he asked Eleanor about herself,

about her doings, about her relations. They both instinctively avoided any mention of his recent bereavement. Eleanor followed his lead gracefully aware of it, and always throwing out feelers for his sympathy. She felt that he eluded her, that he meant to elude her. He avoided the old intimacy into which she tried to draw him.

"Where are you camping?" she asked him.

"In one of Miss Price's fields at present. But I shift to-morrow."

"Oh, let me see your camp!" she begged.

"It isn't fit for you to see," he said quickly. "It's in an awful mess, at least——"

"You don't suppose that I want to see anything but the place as you live in it," she rejoined. "You should have seen my tent last year! Do let us go there after tea."

He had again the feeling that he was being boorish and ungracious to her, and in a sudden mood of repentance agreed.

"It's just an ordinary gypsy's tent," he said. "Ridge pole and blankets and all. I got it from some gypsies here—they'd been using it themselves before."

"How nice! But weren't you afraid of fleas and things, 'little sisters of the poor,' as we used to call them? Then you have seen local gypsydom. This is a regular gypsy village; you know I always talk to them for the sake of Borrow when I see them. These here aren't pure-bred, and very squalid, but of course there is the *tradition* of greatness. Miss Price gets dreadfully annoyed with me if I say they are dirty—she had a gypsy girl as housemaid once, did she ever tell you? and she says she was really clean. But then so many of the gypsies in this village are house-dwellers."

Lyddon banged down his cup in a temper. Then he brought himself to reason with the thought that he himself might have spoken in the same way a little while ago.

"Look here, Eleanor," he said, with a heat which charmed her, "you will make me angry with you if you talk of them as if they were foxes. They have been very good to me——"

"But, Richard, they are practically foxes. That is exactly what I love about them, dear things."

"My dear little girl, you don't love anything about them at all, and it is humbug to pretend you do. That's my quarrel with people like yourself. It's all derived from books. It's second-hand. You look at other human beings, and say 'How picturesque! how romantic! how dirty!' without the least idea that they are as real and as complex as yourself. Far more real, far more real! It is the Baedeker attitude towards life that I hate. It is an insult to live human creatures to say, 'Dear things!'"

Eleanor laughed with real enjoyment. At last she had jerked him into life.

"Richard, it's you at last, come back! You nice, delightful person!"

"I'm one of the 'dear things' too, am I?" he said, with grim humour.

"You are real enough, anyway. No, you are wrong, Dick—it isn't that I don't know they are real. Of course, they are. One speaks superficially, sometimes. Let me meet your gypsies—your friends. I shall like them. I know I shall like them. I shall be frightfully interested in them."

"There's nothing to interest you in them," he said.

"You are disagreeable!"

"No, I am not. Be honest, and you know that talk-

ing to them could only be an exhibition of patronage on your part and of shyness on theirs."

"Dick, you are not fair. You know I always get on well with people like that. Truly, I think their life is wonderful—to live close to Nature like that!"

He smiled sardonically. "Don't you remember what Dr. Johnson said to some one who gushed to him about the superior happiness of what they called the savage life? you would call it the simple life to-day, perhaps. He was far more candid than you are. 'Sir, there can be nothing more false. The savages have no bodily advantages beyond those of civilised men. They have not better health; and as to care or mental uneasiness, they are not above it, but below it, like bears. No, sir, you are not to talk such paradox; let me have no more on't.'"

"What do you mean to prove by that?"

"Johnson was right. If you talked to old Sam James about the gloriousness of living close to Nature, he'd stare. He lives close to Nature because he is Nature, because he is instinct embodied."

"Well, you deny me instinct, then?"

"No, but you and I have travelled so far from instinct that it is ridiculous for us to pretend to understand those who have never followed anything else. There's only one thing can bridge over misunderstanding——" He paused abruptly.

"What's that?"

His heart prompted an answer that reserve held in check, and his lips said, "Great sympathy and intuition that comes of it."

Mary sat in her tent on the hill below her aunt's garden, planting young fern-roots into pots ready for sale in the town. She liked the work, and patted and

pressed the earth into the small pots which the ferns would soon outgrow, with deftness. The earth clung to her fingers—it smelt of the damp places in the woods, and the ferns themselves gave out a bitter, nutty odour which carried the mind into deep, shady places. The young fronds were curled tightly and covered with hairy down; they were shaped like small, brown croziers—and like baby fingers too, Mary thought, as she uncurled one a little and felt its resistance, the youth and tender tenacity of it. From time to time she pushed back her hair, and her earth-stained hands left marks on her forehead.

Her thoughts were with Lyddon. Not definitely, for she was partly thinking about her work; but there was a sweet, warm consciousness of him which mingled with her other thoughts like a golden thread. Mary had borrowed something of Em'ly's glowing beauty in these last days. It was as if a bloom, a richness of colouring, had been lent her by the happiness which filled her. Her blood moved more quickly, her senses were keener, she felt her physical life at its fullest. The intense vitality of which Lyddon was so aware in her, was increased. She could have laughed aloud with the mere joy of living and pride of body. Her twenty-mile walk left her untired; her wide, vivid smile and pretty colouring brought her better luck than she had ever had before in selling her flowers; people turned to look at her in the streets as they looked at Em'ly, and she had heard them say "What a pretty gypsy!" or "What a pretty flower-girl!"

Yet she was not beautiful like Em'ly; it was her joy and youth that made her radiate attraction.

As she pressed in the baby ferns, she sang to herself a little. And then, suddenly, she stopped. Some one was crying, quite close to her.

She put the ferns she had in her lap into the basket again, shook the earth out of her skirt, as she stood up, and listened.

Yes, it was a girl or a woman crying. Mary walked a little way down the hill into the brick valley. To the right lay a cottage inhabited by half-breed hawker-people of the dirtiest and poorest sort. A girl there had just had her third baby. But it was not from the cottage that the weeping came. There was silence, probably young mother and child were both asleep, and the children playing up in the village or in the hollies. The crying came from a clump of gorse farther off in the brick valley. Mary walked towards it, and saw a torn, black skirt and two long, thin legs in muddy boots showing from beneath it.

It was Milly Chilcut. Mary hesitated. The Chilcuts were much despised by the better class of "travellers." Mrs. Chilcut was a woman of disreputable character, and it was said that all her daughters, one after the other, had gone to the bad, with their mother's connivance. The latest scandal about them was that contrary to "traveller" law, which forbids a young man to camp with a young woman of different family until she has been "given" to him, a boy of fifteen, of a family superior to Milly's, had been "'ticed away" by Mrs. Chilcut, and had joined the Chilcuts without his father's consent. No one condemned Milly, who was the cause of the young man's leaving his father's tent, but Mrs. Chilcut was universally blamed.

Mary began to turn away again. The Jameses considered themselves of better family than either the Chilcuts or Milly's lover, and kept free of all disputes or dealings with them. Then the girl's sobs touched her heart, and she went over.

Milly looked up with a tear-stained face. She

was no more than fourteen, though she looked older.

"What's the matter?" said Mary.

Milly only sobbed.

"Yer," said Mary, with gentleness her words belied. "Stop that noise. What is it? Are you cryin' about Teddy?"

Milly nodded her head.

"His father won't have him," she said, between her weeping. "He've a-tarned him out."

"He tarned himself out," said Mary. "What've he done in your tan, taggin' after you all and bringin' shame and talk on you! Why didn't you wait and get married proper?"

Milly sobbed.

"He went back to his father, and his father sent 'im off about his business," she got out.

"Where is he now?"

"We was campin' up at Beaulieu Rails, and he couldn't find us. When he got yer, he was half starved. Hadn't eat nothin' for three days. Like a skelitin he was. Hadn't no tent nor nothin'."

"He's no good," said Mary impatiently. "There's always sacks to be had for the askin'. He could make hisself a tent if he wanted."

"He've a-made hisself one now with sacks and rags what he picked up," said Milly, looking up with quick hostility.

"Well, what you're cryin' about, now?"

"I wish he hadn't a-come back," said Milly, crying afresh.

"Well, why don't you send him about his business?"

"Oh, I can't!"

"Then git married."

As soon as she had given this advice Mary hesitated.

What would these two feckless children do if they married and began to beget other children? Where would their bread come from?

"What can Ted do? What can he make money at?"

"I dunno," said the girl, picking sullenly at the grass.

"Are you goin' to have a baby?" asked Mary suddenly.

"No, I ain't."

"Well, why don't you send Ted off and make him earn some money, and then marry him?" said Mary.

The girl said nothing. She seemed half-stupid from fear or grief, or indecision.

"I'd be ashamed to have folks talkin' as they do about you and your mother 'tacin' Ted off like that."

Milly had a sudden blaze of anger.

"You can't talk, Mary James. Folks is sayin' things 'bout you and your fine Gorgo up in the bushes."

Mary flushed.

"What things is they a-sayin'?"

Milly said the unspeakable thing, and Mary flashed into fury.

"You say it again, Milly Chilcut!"

Milly repeated it and stood up, wild-eyed.

Mary took a step forward. She scarcely knew what she intended to do, but before she had raised a hand or uttered a sound the half-savage child, for she was little more, had hit her in the face with a stick which she held in her hand. The switch caught Mary in the eye, and the pain and smart were so intense that she staggered back, unable to see. When she sprang forward to grapple with her assailant, she found that Milly had fled. Nevertheless, she made an attempt to chase her, though her vision was blurred with tears of pain. She saw, as she wiped them away on her apron,

that it was blood-stained. The twig had cut her eyelid. She soon desisted from her useless and angry pursuit. She had stumbled after Milly on to the high-road, but now sat on a stone near its dusty verge, hot-faced and panting, and vowing that she would give that Chilcut girl what-for when next she met her. She could scarcely open her injured eye, but after a while she had recovered sufficiently to get up and make her way towards Miss Price's field. She would make up a fire in Lyddon's tent against his return, which he had told her might be about half-past six—supper-time. She forgot her smarting eye and angry feelings as she drew near the field in which his tent was pitched, smokeless, below a blackthorn hedge now in full leaf. Life held bigger, sweeter things for her, she could afford to put her desire for revenge in the background. Only an hour separated her from the man that was her world and her sole desire. She tightened her hands as if in a foretaste of happiness.

"When I've made his fire I'll nip back and clean meself in a bucket of water," she thought. She knew that her lover liked to see her tidy and neat, and was aware that her appearance at present did not fulfil that ideal.

She was always making feverish inner notes of his approvals and disapprovals. He did not care to see dirty nails, for she had watched him with some surprise cleaning his own, though it was only earth which blackened them, and earth is, to a gypsy, "clean dirt," and not defiling. Since then she had toiled at her own with a piece of stick. She noticed that he did not like to see her sister's children with running noses, and wiped the baby's whenever she was in charge, and saw that its face was free from any stain, however "clean" the dirt. She brushed her thick hair with

the broken old brush that was one of her treasures, and was repaid when he touched it and called it beautiful. She washed it too, and called out burnished browns, like autumn sunshine on fallen leaves, in its cloudy darkness. She wore her prettiest kerchief—she noticed that he preferred her in a “diklo” to a hat. Her beads and gauds he liked, or she would have sacrificed them.

She sounded him with cunning as to any change which he desired in her. Clean of person, as most of the purer blood gypsies, she had always been, but now she strove after the niceties of the toilet. She even unearthed a tooth-brush, which was a relic of the days when she had attended a board school, and brushed her even young teeth with it—before this access of coquetry she had only picked them after meals with a splinter when they needed it. But health and simple living will often keep the teeth white where the arts of civilisation fail. Mary regarded the tooth-brush as an unnecessary refinement, but an elegance which made her worthier of her gentleman lover. Her Granny James had not an unsound tooth in her head when she died, though they were yellowed with tobacco smoke, and she would not have known what to do with a tooth-brush.

Mary picked up a little bundle of firewood from a hole in the hedge where she had hidden it beside the bridal blossom of wild carrot, still heavy with the morning's rain, which lined the water-filled ditch. Here, in the lee of the hedge, it was warm, and bees, hastening to fetch in their toll of honey and pollen after the rain, buzzed pleasantly in the field over the buttercups and young clover. The showers had given the spring growth fresh impulse. A may-bush gave out a riot of disquieting perfume. The girl rolled the bundle into

her dirty apron, jumped the ditch again, and then came to a surprised standstill, and looked about for a means of escape. Lyddon was approaching her on the path, and with him was a lady.

But to evade them was impossible. They were directly in the line of retreat. Nothing could have been more unfortunate. She remembered her dirty and blood-stained face, her earthy hands, her apron, her marks of conflict. Lyddon must not see her, above all he must not feel ashamed of her before a gauji lady. She crouched down into the ditch, and pretended to busy herself with tying up the wood in the hope that Lyddon would pass her by. But Eleanor was anxious to be gracious to any of the hawker people that she encountered; Mary's dark hair, from which the yellow diklo had slipped, and the gleam of her swinging earrings caught her attention, and she delayed Lyddon, who would have passed on.

"Here is a friend of yours, I know!" she said. "You are a gypsy, I am sure!"

"I'm a traveller, my lady," said Mary, reddening, her head kept down, her eyes anxiously turned towards Lyddon's figure, half-arrested in the path.

"Dick, Dick! come here and introduce me," called Eleanor.

"Come and see the tent," said he, with a sub-note of anxiety and irritation, signing behind her back to Mary to go away.

But Mary's escape was blocked relentlessly by Eleanor, and Lyddon's gesture angered her. Who was this fine raunie who called him by his first name, and was made welcome to his tent?

"Do you tell fortunes?" said Eleanor.

"No, m'lady," said Mary in her hoarse, sweet voice.

"Oh, you do! You know you do. I'm not going to

tell on you. Dick, do make her come in your tent with us and read my hand."

"She doesn't tell fortunes," said Lyddon impatiently over his shoulder. "Come along, Eleanor."

"No, I'm not coming on. It's no good getting annoyed. I know you too well to mind if you are annoyed or not."

Mary lifted her head at last to throw a hasty glance at him, that was half resentment and half alarm.

"Oh, my dear child," said Eleanor in genuine concern, "what have you done to your eye?" She came close. "Oh, what a dreadful cut! It might have blinded you."

She had her hand on Mary's arm now, and Mary wriggled free sulkily.

"And you've rubbed earth into it! You silly girl, you might get tetanus or some dreadful disease by doing a thing like that. Promise me to go right home and wash it out at once. No, wait! I'll do it for you, here in Mr. Lyddon's tent."

"I don't want it washed, m'lady!"

"Leave the girl alone, Eleanor, and come along," said Lyddon desperately, striding back.

Mary's resentment and suspicion suddenly flamed up against her lover. She drew herself straight, and looked at him.

"You leave me alone, my lady," said she, with simulated humility, "like the gennleman yer tells you. You don't want to touch us dirty travellers, look, with your nice, clean 'ands, do she, my gennleman?"

Lyddon swore under his breath. Mary had misunderstood him.

"Mary!" he said appealingly.

She took no notice of him.

"I'll goo and wash it myself," she said, gazing down

at Eleanor. "It's on'y a scratch I got fightin'. We travellers has a bit of a scrap now and agen betwixt ourselves."

"What has happened? Who did that, Mary?" asked her lover, pushing himself before her, resolved that she should not think him willing to ignore her.

He scarcely thought of what he said in his anxiety to correct her impression.

"A b—— b——," said Mary deliberately, gazing past him at Eleanor, and made a wild dash for freedom to the gate, conscious that she had petrified her hearers.

"What an ill-mannered specimen," remarked Eleanor coolly, facing Lyddon.

"I—I am engaged to be married to her," he said.

"Oh——" said Eleanor, and for the moment she could find nothing else to say in the face of such a statement.

Lyddon walked along beside her in angry silence. He was angry with himself, angry with Eleanor, angry with Mary. What in heaven's name had induced Mary to come in such a state, at the precise moment when he would have shielded her from the critical presence of Eleanor? Why in the name of the powers had she, usually so gentle, chosen to behave like a wild cat? and why had he allowed the situation to develop? He was roused from his distressed meditation by Eleanor.

"I am so sorry, Dick. You must be longing to wring my neck!"

"It is I who ought to apologise," he said furiously.

"Only for stupidity, my dear man. Of course——" she hesitated and then said, not without malice—"your fiancée was hurt at your attitude. You should have introduced her at once, and not tried to hurry me

past. It looked as though you were ashamed of her, and that was enough to make her angry."

He made no answer.

They had reached the door of the tent, and she seated herself on a box at the entrance, and reaching up to him, laid her little hand on his sleeve impulsively.

"My dear Dick, we are old enough friends for you to have told me this at first. Did you think I shouldn't understand?"

"Yes," he said, softening. "I did."

"Well, you are wrong," she said. "I can understand, knowing you." Then she added, after a pause, "She is handsome. And very young."

Lyddon shrank from discussing Mary. He told himself again and again that he had not been ashamed of her, that he could never be ashamed of her. Yet she, whose shyness and sweetness had charmed him, had shown herself for once as a virago, and that before a woman whose friendship had been so long part of his life that he valued it.

"Are you honestly fond of her?" said Eleanor, with sudden directness. "Don't be angry with me for asking, Dick."

"Of course, I am."

Eleanor thought for a moment.

"I should like to meet her again, under more favourable circumstances," she said. "I shouldn't like the girl you are to marry to hate me. You nearly brought that about."

"You two will have nothing in common," he said, with stiffness. "Mary is a wild creature; she isn't able to express herself, least of all to you. I'm not going to make the mistake of taking her out of her environment."

She smiled, and indicated the smoky little tent.

"This?"

"Perhaps."

"Then you're not going back to the Belloni people?"

"I've dropped the commercial side of it for evermore. If I work again, I shall work and experiment for myself."

"And your career—are you without ambition?"

"The kind of ambition you mean leads into captivity of mind and body."

"And may not this new life of yours make you narrow? And yet I don't know. I always said you were not twentieth century. I suppose it was an instinct like yours that drove monks out of communities to caves on the mountain side—to throw everything overboard; I've had it myself. But most of us are afraid to try, we are conscious that we should fail, that we shouldn't be self-sufficient enough. Perhaps you will make a success of it, you cave-man!"

He laughed, his good humour restored.

"It is no definite experiment," he said shyly. "Don't think that. It is only a freedom to come and go as I like, to be independent of a society which means nothing to me, to have the right to wander up and down the earth as I please, and enough money to enable me to do it, to follow an instinct which has possessed me since I was a boy, which is to avoid the high-roads and follow the foot-paths, and be accountable to no one for my behaviour."

"You are a Peter Pan in the tree-tops," said she. "You never grew up. Will you have any headquarters where one may expect to write to you sometimes?"

"A tramp's headquarters," he said, with a laugh, balancing a half-burnt stick on his finger. "Seriously, I expect I shall have a permanent camp somewhere. You see we may have children. And I shall do a

little work, too, and for that we shall want to have a roof."

"Then you are going to live for the things you care for most?" she said wistfully. "Perhaps you are right, Dick. I feel often as if one needed a cataclysm to rid one's being of the parasite needs and artificialities which cling on to one's real self and choke it. To enjoy life as little children enjoy it, and young mothers enjoy it, and birds enjoy it—only Peter Pans can do that, if they are not either children or young mothers or birds. Civilised existence is so vulgar and noisy that one gets deafened to the under and over tones. Success in life means failure in the essentials which are so difficult to name."

He caught the note of sincerity in her voice, and for a moment saw an Eleanor who admitted defeat, an Eleanor who had for the moment dropped the pretence of being satisfied with what her life had to offer her. There were lines about her mouth, hardness in her eyes. A rush of sympathy for her made him say the thing which hurt most.

"You ought to marry, you ought to have children. You've just admitted that's the way women get hold of the best there is."

"Yes," she said. "I ought to have had children. So ought ever so many women that I know. Failing that, one can't afford to see too much of Nature. One is afraid of her. She gives one such blunt reminders. She has a way of reminding one of the *élan vital*—do you know your Bergson? She throws spring-time and young birds and lambs in your teeth. So town life and all its distractions and occupations become a necessity to a lonely woman. I've a craving for clean air and wild places which I dare not satisfy. I sometimes think that women are afraid of Nature just because

Nature is imperative in them. If it weren't for women, there would be no civilised life. Artificiality is their refuge."

"What nonsense you're talking," said he positively. "You will marry. You are so——" he hesitated. "You're everything that most men like—pretty and clever and charming, and all that."

"You are most encouraging," she retorted. "But I don't want 'most men.' That's an obstacle, don't you think?"

"Why didn't you marry Guy Rochester?"

"Why didn't I? I'll tell you some day."

"You let me think——"

"Crudest of all crude Adams. I've told you. If I could have married him I would have. I did my best to persuade myself, I assure you. But I would far rather talk of your affairs than of my disappointed spinsterhood."

He reddened, and said nothing. Even to talk of Mary to Eleanor was in a subtle way a disloyalty to the gypsy.

"What would have happened if we had married years ago!" she said inconsequently. "How curious fate is."

"It would have been queer," he said uncomfortably. He wished she would go. It was getting near the time at which he expected Mary. Eleanor always fascinated him while she was with him, but now his undercurrent of thought was for Mary. Would she come? Would she be sulking in the hollies, waiting for him to come and find her? Would she wait for him by the bog opposite the blackened ruin of the hillside? He felt an impatience to get away from Eleanor and the atmosphere of self-consciousness which clung to her like a scent to a silk gown.

“What is her name?” said Eleanor, rising, as if she divined his thought.

“Mary.”

“I like that, Dick. Will you see me back to Miss Price’s? The motor ought to be there soon, and I want to talk to her before I go. Don’t come into the house, go and find your pretty savage, and beg her pardon. I shall meet her and try to win her heart some day. Tell her I don’t mind being called bad names.”

He bit his lip.

“She didn’t realise——”

“Don’t, Dick! That polite manner means that you are angry again.”

He was obliged to laugh at her air of misery.

“All square?” she asked.

“All square,” he said.

“Good-bye. Best of luck to you both.”

CHAPTER XVIII

ELEANOR had rightly surmised that Miss Price's curiosity would ensure her early return.

"Where's your Richard?" asked the old maid from her basket-chair by the window when her guest entered the room.

Eleanor sat down on the sofa, and leant her two elbows on its cushioned end.

"Consoling his gypsy, I expect. You should have warned me."

"Of what?"

"About this girl."

"He has assured me there is nothing in it. Tell me, what has happened?"

"Then you do know something of the girl?"

"Of Mary James? You've heard that gossip? The girl washes up for him, that's all."

"I had it from Richard himself."

"What is 'it'? No, that noise was not your car; I can see the road from the window. Be quick, Eleanor. What do you mean?"

"He is engaged to be married to the young woman in question. I met her, and had an unpleasant little scene with her, and then he told me. She used some cabby swear-words to me."

"Eleanor! You must be dreaming!" said Miss Price sharply. "I tackled him about Mary myself, and he assured me there was nothing in the talk. And Mary James! Such a nice girl—when kept in her place. I can't believe that Mary swore at you. My gypsy

girls always speak so respectfully. It is bewildering. I can't understand it."

Eleanor gave a laugh.

"That's because you haven't considered the probabilities. Propinquity, spring, a nice-looking girl—and you know Richard's sensitiveness and kindness."

Miss Price stiffened and quivered. "Oh, Eleanor! Oh, my dear, you don't imply that he's got the girl into trouble, and that——"

"No," said Eleanor quickly, brushing the suggestion aside. "Not that, I hope. It may be. But in any case I can't pretend to be pleased at such a marriage. Whatever Richard might have been to me doesn't matter now. But I shall miss him, as a friend. We shall never be friends again. I don't mean that I should be snobbish about his wife—good Lord, no!—but he'll be terribly on the defensive about her and see snobbishness where none exists. You know how it is with such marriages. And she—she'll hate me, naturally, knowing that there has been something more than friendship between her husband and me, years ago. And then the pity of it! He has no ambition. Fool as Marjorie was, and tactlessly as she set about it, he would have had no position but for her. He wants a wife who will spur him on without letting him feel the rowel, who will see that he doesn't altogether neglect his worldly interests. I know him so well; I know just where Marjorie failed and irritated him; I should never make the mistake of dragging him into society, as she did. Richard wants such management. There was no sympathy between them . . . and now, while he is still a young man, he will ruin himself for ever and just sink into a nobody—an eccentric nobody at that."

"I wonder if you *do* understand him so well as you think?" said Miss Price, in one of her bursts of unpleas-

ant shrewdness and candour. "There is a mystic hidden in that man, you know."

"Of course I know he is a genius," said Eleanor. "But a genius who has no one to explain and label him gets put in the wrong glass case. Yes, I'm materialistic, I'm utilitarian, I'm vulgar! But it's for Richard. He will degenerate if he marries a girl like that. If you had seen her! So untidy, so filthy! Men are so unfastidious. I could never bear a man near me with a soiled collar, far less kiss him. I assure you her whole appearance was dirty, really dirty. But men aren't made selective like women. It is a fact one has to face."

"She isn't dirty as a rule," said Miss Price, with mild asperity. "Eleanor, my dear, don't trouble yourself about it. There must be a mistake. I shall see Mary James and her aunt and have it out with them. The marriage is impossible, and it's not to be thought of. It would be a great mistake, and a pity for Mary as well as Mr. Lyddon."

"Forget our conversation of this afternoon," said Eleanor, fidgeting with the cord of the cushion.

"There is no need to forget it," replied Miss Price, with spirit. "I tell you the marriage is absurd, and I shall stop it. But don't you make a mistake about Lyddon either, and badger him into being what he isn't, even though you succeed in persuading him he wants to be, and you are clever enough to do that. Here's a piece of worldly wisdom that I've picked up: if a woman attracts a man through what he wants to be but isn't, she has no lasting hold on him. If she attracts him through what he can't help being, her hold is as strong as death. Upon my word, Eleanor, if I were Mr. Lyddon I'd steer clear of women altogether; but in England you can no more do that than a man can keep off locusts when he's walking through a plague

of them. They settle on him, blunder into him, and insist on getting into his way. I wouldn't be a man in this woman-ridden country for more than a thousand pounds. In Mary's class the proportion is better; there's a man to every woman and a woman to every man, so there's no man-chasing. Thank goodness, I'm contented with my spinsterhood."

"I'm not hunting the sex," said Eleanor, stung as her friend had intended. "I am too horribly selective."

"That's obstinacy," said Miss Price. "Here's the motor, and your aunt is coming up the path. You must get your hat on."

Eleanor got up and, coming to her, kissed her battered cheek.

"Don't think me horrible," she said. "I want to be nice to the gypsy if I can. I shall come one day and see her, and try to make her like me. I dare say she may conceal untold fascinations beneath the soil of honest toil, as a labour leader would put it. I must get used to the idea of doing without Dick. The hard part will be that Aunt Helen and everybody else is expecting an announcement of our engagement. That's the only pleasant feature of the situation. It is always a satisfaction to disappoint popular expectation."

Mary's first mood of resentment and anger rapidly changed into one of profound misery. She walked rapidly along the high-road towards Burley, meeting many of the villagers in their Sunday clothes who looked askance at the unkempt gypsy girl. She soon left the last house behind her, and, turning off on to the heather, stood looking over the wild heath that lay between her and Burley, bosomed in distant trees. The long pond in the valley gleamed and mirrored the great cumuli, heavy with unfallen rain. The clearness which

spoke of rain near at hand brought Burley Beacon nearer by two miles. The heather, still wet from the morning's heavy showers, was dark green-brown at her feet, becoming purple on the further slopes. The brown bracken was plum-coloured in the distance. The colours were rich and vivid. Near her there was the steady sound of cropping—a pony, its shaggy hide red as fire in the transitory sunlight, was busily feeding. A peaty bracken and heather-sweet smell rose to her out of the valley, as it were, the very soul of the heath and bog. It brought her vague comfort. She hated the Sunday-attired folk who had passed her on the high-road, she hated the rows of cottages and houses that bordered it, she hated the gaujo and all his works to-day. Here on the bog and heath they were the anomalies, they were the blots, and she in her proper place. That gauji lady would look silly here. She wished that Lyndon might see the gauji crossing a bog, afraid to wet her boots and afraid to jump from tussock to tussock. She gave vent to a hoarse shout which alarmed the peaceful pony, and sent him trotting down the hillside. Mary followed him, leaping the low gorse bushes, and chasing him into a gallop into the boggy bottom. She was as regardless of pool or quaking ground as he, but came to a stop at the first of the bog streams which drained the hill, and, stooping beside its yellow-brown water where it deepened into a pool, she rinsed her earthy hands and laved her hot and soiled face and the wounded eye. She ended by scooping up some of the water into her hollowed palms and drinking it. After that she still sat balanced on the heels of her muddy boots staring into the water, thinking.

A rabbit whisked past her on the opposite side of the stream with a terrified glance at the enemy. Water-spiders on the surface of the stream moved themselves

forward against the current with a sharp movement, then let themselves glide back with it to the place from which they had started with monotonous regularity.

Mary watched them unseeingly. She was only conscious of the ache of misery in her wild little heart. Her sin in using bad talk to the raunie who was her lover's guest rose up before her and outloomed the conduct she had resented in Lyddon. She had "spoke names" to the raunie, and violated not only her own inbred instinct of courtesy, but her lover's confidence in her. She imagined he must now see her in her own light as a rough, good-for-nothing little gypsy slut, not worthy of his condescension. She scarcely reasoned to herself, but sat there suffering dumbly. Love had stirred unknown instincts in her; she was new to herself, and only recognised that the ache in her throat of unshed tears and the dread of her lover's just contempt was a bitterness passing the bitterness of physical pain.

"I must go," she thought at last, and walked back into the village again and to her aunt's cottage, at the back of which her tent was pitched.

Aunt Matilda stood at the door.

"Mr. Allward bin yer, askin' for you," she said.

"Have he?"

"Had yer supper?" asked her aunt, not unkindly, noting with gypsy quickness the girl's dispirited look.

"No."

"Well, ov in, and have a bite with us. Old Joe he've a-got a drop of levina, and you an' me'll help him with it. 'Twill do you good. Who've bin a-dellin' of you?"

"Milly Chilcut have."

"And what've she got to do with you? That sarves you right for having to do with they Chilcuts. I

wouldn't go near 'em if you was to give me panj kullas. Milly's mother an't no better'n a low vassable lubbeny, and her gals'll be the same, you mark what I say."

Mary came in and sat at the table, on which bread-and-cheese was already set. Joseph Jeff sat by the open hearth, in which a log fire was burning, smoking a short clay pipe. He was a taciturn man who rarely looked any one straight in the face, but peered at them sideways, like a wild animal that must put constraint upon itself to meet the human eye. He had an air of distrusting every one. But he was learned in woodcraft and forest lore; he knew where the plovers nest year after year, he knew where the vixens had cubbed and how many there were in a litter, he knew where to find the deer, and could tell the age of a doe or buck by inspection of its slot by some occult process of his own. He earned a little by gardening and doing odd jobs for Miss Price and others in the village. His hands were deeply ingrained with soil, the nails were broken and full of earth, his face was gnarled and knotted like the bole of a tree. He was fond of his wife in his silent way, and once when ill, on which occasion a patron had offered to send the village nurse to him, he had uttered the longest sentence he had ever been known to make to a stranger—

"No martel woman shall ever touch me while She's in the house. I don't want no other woman yer."

Stickler for propriety as Matilda Jeff was in all things, it was known to the hawkers that she and her husband had never been married according to the rites of the Church. Like most of the older generation, they had "jumped the broomstick and run off into the bushes," to quote Mrs. Jeff's account of it, and since then he had never looked at another woman. A well-

meant district visitor had once unearthed the never-mentioned fact that neither Church nor State had blessed their union, but Mrs. Jeff refused indignantly all entreaty to get married. "And make myself ridiklous, a despectable woman with five children, no, thank-you, miss! Our way of gettin' married is as good as any one's, though it might be old-fashion. The gals can marry in church when their time comes—I'm a deligious woman myself, and I han't got nothin' against it, but it would set every one laughin' if me an' Joe was to get orange-blossomin'. Who married Adam and Eve?—tell me that. There's nothin' about a church weddin' as I can hear about. There wasn't no parsons then. They just did what Joe and me did: jumped the broomstick and went off into the bushes and said no more about it, meanin' to hold to each other honest. That's an old travellers' custom, that is."

Joe Jeff produced two bottles of beer from a shelf by the fireplace, and proceeded to fill up his glass and that of his wife and niece. Mary only bit at her bread and cheese; she was too unhappy to eat. The children were already abed, the bedridden grandmother was sleeping, Em'ly up at her married sister's cottage, and the boys were not yet back.

"What did you and Milly get to words about?" asked Mrs. Jeff.

"Nothin'," said Mary. "She got angry 'cos I asked her about Ted, and up with a stick and hit my eye."

"It's a disgracement about them two," pronounced Mrs. Jeff. "Ted's father's a despectable man, and it'll break his heart. I lay Ted'll go strawberryin' with the Chilcuts, the young good-fer-naught. We all knaws it's Amelia Chilcut's fault, and that she've a'ticed Ted away, but he haven't much more in him than a straw to let hisself be 'ticed. Miss Price talked

to me about it to-day, and asked me to spik to Amelia. 'No,' I says, 'we don't have nothin' to do with they. 'Tisn't for me to give them chastisement,' I says. When she went herself to see Amelia about it up at Burley Bushes, the talk she got skeered even her. Raunies has no call to mix theirselves up in folkeses' business, say I. If they does, they'll sometimes git more'n they expected. Eat yer cheese, Mary. They say Amelia got Charlotte Cooper to put a spell on Ted, so's he'd follow them, but I don't believe that, because Charlotte went down the road at the tail-end of their cart when they was shiftin' their tan the other day, and cursed 'em in some of her half-Injun ta'ak. Old chovihaun, she is! Don't you never go an' be dookered by her, Mary, my girl—if she've her eye on you she'll bring you bad bokkt, that's sartain."

"When did Mr. Allward come?" asked Mary.

"About an hour agone."

Mrs. Jeff usually preferred silence on this vexed question. Allus, contrary to all Mary's expectation, had kept what she had seen to herself after unburdening herself to Mary about it.

Lyddon's friendly relations with the girls had disarmed Mrs. Jeff's suspicions, moreover. He joked with her as he joked with Allus and Em'ly and 'Enry. And it was known that artists were queerer than other gaujos, and acted as other people dared not act. If a real high and mighty gaujo with money in his pocket had been hanging around Mary, she explained to her husband, she would have packed the girl off up country.

"When's your dad a-coming?" Joe asked Mary suddenly during the progress of the meal, his mouth full of cheese.

"I dunno. Some time next wik, I specks."

"Bill Pidgeley seen him in Christchurch yesterday," said Joe, with the creaky slowness of a taciturn man.

Mary's face brightened. If this were true, he would come to Thorneyhill on the morrow, and they would be able to make their move to Verely, always her favourite camping-ground. She felt at home in the forest, as much as she felt reckless and unhappy in the vicinity of a village. In the forest no one questioned her doings. The trees and bushes asked no questions; their presence was friendly and dumb. The very smell of the leaf loam carried with it something that filled her with vague well-being.

And she was glad that her father was coming back from one of his mysterious trips, usually connected with some deal in horseflesh.

The talk fell upon various subjects. If her husband and niece were silent, Mrs. Jeff, her natural loquacity being reinforced by several glasses of beer, talked for them. Then Em'ly came in, her best diklo round her pretty throat; and Tom and Jim, both flushed with the beer they had drunk up in the village; and Mary prepared to go out to her tent. Her uncle always had the task of filling the bucket from the well in the garden before retiring for the night, and her aunt of raking out the fire and putting sticks to dry in the chimney corner, so that they might have everything ready for the cup of tea with which they began their day at five each morning.

Mary went out through the rain-fresh garden with its potato patch to her dark tent, and crept into her smoky blankets. A small and dirty cat belonging to neighbours had preceded her, but to-night she was glad of the comfort of its thin and warm body, and hugged it in her arms, listening to the throb of its purring until she fell asleep.

Under the hawthorn hedge a quarter of a mile away Lyddon slept in his tent too. He had looked for Mary in all the usual trysting-places that evening in vain, had cooked his own supper, and gone to bed in not the best of tempers. He woke late the next morning, and as he dressed he wondered anew and with irritation why she had kept away. It was unlike her to sulk. One thing was certain; they must marry as soon as possible. Eleanor would tell Miss Price, and Miss Price would tell every one, and the only way to stop the clack of tongues was to marry Mary and take her away with him. He was learning by slow degrees that one can evade as little in a desert as in a town the annoyance caused by other people's interest in what does not concern them—even less, in fact. The morning was glorious. He set out for his work; first person he met was Joe Jeff, slouching along the road.

“Mrs. Jeff gone to Christchurch?”

“Yes,” said Joe, with a sidelong glance, not stopping.

“And Em'ly and Mary and all of them?”

“Yes.”

So far so good. Lyddon went up to Miss Price's for his day's work, and that lady astutely forbore to come near him. The people to attack were—not Lyddon, who had showed himself irresponsible, but Mary and her aunt. She had known Mary ever since babyhood, and respect for Miss Price was one of the first principles taught to the village gypsy children by their mothers. She remembered that it was a flower-selling day, however, and that they would not be back from Christchurch till the late afternoon. She made up her mind to go down to Mrs. Jeff's cottage after tea.

She did so. A horse was cropping quietly outside on the patch of green between the cottage and the road,

and a donkey nibbled at the hollies opposite. A lean yellow mongrel of a breed popular among the gypsies in Thorneyhill barked at the old lady, and then fawned upon her.

"Mrs. Jeff!" said Miss Price in her authoritative voice, ramming her old rush hat firmly on her head.

A voice from inside the cottage answered her indistinctly, and then Mrs. Jeff appeared on the stone flags outside the always open door. In spite of her fair hair, her gypsy blood betrayed itself in the brightly coloured kerchief knotted around her neck, the earrings in her ears, and her healthy bronzed colour.

"Come in, come in, my lady!" she cried hospitably.

Miss Price accepted her invitation, and entering, sat down on the wooden chair which Mrs. Jeff dusted for her. Though the remains of a meal were on the table, spread with a newspaper instead of a cloth, the living-room was clean. The dresser which faced the door was gay with ware of all kinds, the mantelpiece over the open fireplace was adorned by a short curtain of cretonne, and the floor, in spite of the fact that hens darted in now and again in the hope of finding crumbs, was well washed.

"And where are the girls and boys?" asked Miss Price.

"Em'ly's up along with Prissy, my lady, becos Prissy've got a place in her breast and she's bin to the infirmary in Christchurch to-day to see the doctor, an' he says she've to wash it out with some stuff what he give her, and Em'ly's helpin' of her, look, my lady. And Allus is out along of her dad and brothers somewhars; they've just a-had their tea. Nothin' won't kip my old man indoors except mealtimes, my lady."

"And Mary James? I thought she was stopping with you."

"She put up a bit of a tent in the garden, my lady, but her dad picked her up in the road as we was a-goin' to Christchurch this marning about six o'clock, and she've a-took her things and gone off along of him."

"And where have they gone?"

"Up Verely or Forest Corner, I expects, my lady. That's where old Sam James'll go."

"Well, Mrs. Jeff, it was about Mary that I wanted to see you. You remember that you came to me a little while ago about a man who was working for me and had been camping with the Jameses?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Have you noticed that Mary has had much to do with him?"

"She cooks his supper for him and cleans up a bit for him, my lady, but there's no harm to him; he's a gennleman what's got a fancy for our way of livin'. On'y playin' at it, he is. He don't treat Mary no differ'nt to what he treats Em'ly or Allus, my lady."

"You have heard no talk of a marriage between Mary and this man?"

"A marriage? No, my lady, I never heerd of such a thing."

"Mary has told you nothing of the kind?"

"No, my lady."

"Well, you can see for yourself that the idea of a marriage like that would not be a happy one for Mary. I know something of this man, and I should be sorry to see Mary married out of her station to some one who is not in the least suited to her."

"Is he rich, my lady?" asked Mrs. Jeff, her eyes bright with curiosity.

"He has some money. That is not the point. If he were to marry a girl like Mary he would be injuring himself, and sooner or later he would realise it and

there would be unhappiness. I do not know how far this affair has gone, but I am not one of those who think that a marriage can ever mend past foolishness. You are a sensible woman, Mrs. Jeff, and you know that Mary would be far happier with a man who was one of yourselves. I will promise to give her five pounds the day she marries some suitable man."

"I shan't be seeing Mary for some time, my lady; we shall go off strawberryin' before she comes back this way ag'in, most likely."

"Write to her."

"I don't know wheer to send a letter to, my lady. Sam don't move reg'lar, like some of the travellers. Besides, I can't write."

"I'm not sorry to hear that," said Miss Price. "I think that on the whole I have found more horse sense in those who cannot write or read than in those who fill up their heads with a lot of rubbish. Well, good-bye, Mrs. Jeff. I seem to have wasted your time. For Mary's sake, I should hold my tongue about what I have told you. Here is a petticoat which may fit you; we are about the same height."

"You haven't any old boots, my lady, have you? Yours just about fit Allus, and hers are almost wore through."

Miss Price's dumpy figure ascended the green nap, and disappeared at the bend of the road. Mrs. Jeff watched her out of sight, and then hastily traversed the patch of garden behind the cottage, and, letting herself down over the bank, walked down into the brick valley. It was the short cut to Prissy's cottage, where she knew she would find Em'ly.

In another minute she was sitting with the two young gypsy women, while her grandchildren, with unwashed

faces, played beneath the table with their mother's hawking basket, unnoticed. Mrs. Jeff breathlessly communicated to her daughters what Miss Price had said.

"But who could have a-told her that Adam wanted to marry Mary?" exclaimed Prissy.

"P'raps Mary did," said Em'ly the beautiful, darkly.

"Not she. She've a-kept it all dark. I'll lay it was the fine rye hisself," Mrs. Jeff declared.

"I ain't seen them a-choomerin' or sweetheartin'," said Prissy.

"That Allus is as deep as Mary. I warr'nt she'd a-knaw somethin' of all this, the sly little varmint as she is."

"How rich is he, do you think, mother?"

"I'll lay he's got his bit hidden away somewheres."

"He kekker delled mandy chee!"

And so the clack of tongues prognosticated by Lyddon began and continued in Thorneyhill.

CHAPTER XIX

MARY JAMES and her father did not make their camp in Verely or in the wilder, statelier aisles of Ridley Wood. They took the carts up the road until they came to the cross-roads at Pickett's Post, where the Broad London highway sweeps past between Ringwood and Southampton. On this May morning, from the heights of the heathery plateau, they could see for miles through the blue heat haze. Ridley and Verely to the south-east shimmered in their fresh young green through a plum-dust of blue; to the south-west the great moorland valley, imbrued with royal blues and purples, ran towards Bournemouth; and to the north lay the wildest, most inviolate part of the whole Forest, towards the noble stretches of Cranbourne Chace and Gorley, God's Hill and Fordingbridge. The road dazzled, every outline was clear and defined in the May sunshine. The sky was May month blue, lavender with heat near the horizon.

The Jameses' camp was to be at Forest Corner, so named because the wilderness meets the sown there, and the forest abuts on civilisation. Upon the western and northern boundaries of the Forest this division is clearly, almost abruptly, marked. It is as if there were a feud between the cultivated ground and the forest land which would never be healed, a feud as deep-grained and irreconcilable as that between gypsies and agriculturists.

No other tents were visible among the furze-bushes and heather when they drew within view of their camp, though a rag or two fluttering from the bushes told that some vagrants had only just departed. The terriers

footed it daintily beside the carts as they moved slowly down the rutted way, worn by many gypsy carts, to this favourite camping-ground.

In such halcyon weather as this Mary would usually have gone along, as she had once told Lyddon, laughing to herself for sheer joy of living. But to-day she walked by the donkey's head dispiritedly, smoking her cigarette and slouching as though she carried a basket.

"What's the matter with you, my rakli?" her father had asked once on the road.

"My yed 'urts where Milly hit it," she lied.

"I'll give Milly a pretty taste of a thick kosht when I sees her," her father had said, and accepting her explanation had walked along in the happy coma of the tramp when the road is good, the sky blue, and a clay pipe alight. If he thought at all, he thought with lazy complacence of his own affairs. To-day he had business in Ringwood, so Mary would be left in charge of the camp during his absence.

She had no sooner put up the tents, however, and unharnessed the donkey—her father took the cart with him—than a second family arrived. It was Joe Whicher and his wife with their four children. They had always claimed cousinship with the Jameses, and as they were clean, prosperous, pleasant-spoken people, the Jameses had usually shown themselves friendly towards them. To-day the sight of Mrs. Whicher's fair, sunburnt, smiling face was very welcome to Mary. Though not well-off like Sam James, they were prosperous enough through constant industry, and had just bought a cart of which they were proud. One of the boys had gone to collect furze-tops for the horse to eat, the eldest girl was gathering wood in Ridley, and the youngest boy and baby sat in the cart.

"Where have you a-come from?" Mary asked them.

"We bin down Verely," Mrs. Whicher replied. "How are you, Mary? You don't look yerself. What you bin doin' to that eye of yourn? Now, chavis! don't you dare to touch they sticks till I tells you, else I'll take your heads off! Faithy! you stop now, or I'll give you what-for!"

Her cheerful face belied her words, and Mary helped her to drive in the tent-stakes while she explained that her eye was the work of Milly Chilcut. Mrs. Whicher was voluble in condemning the Chilcuts, but not severely; she was never severe with any one, she liked to find excuses for anything in the world which went awry.

"What do you think Joe a-found just before we left Verely this morning?" she asked. "You tell Mary, Joe."

"I kicked ag'in somethink soft when I was buryin' a bit of rubbish last night," the young man said, lifting his pipe from his mouth. "I thought it was a dead fox by the feel of it, but I can't a-bear to touch anything dead. I got a weak stomach, and it turns me if I do. So I went and looked this morning, and there was a fine girt setter, a black one, lyin' there as dead as a door-nail, with his legs and tail right across the path! I'll lay it's they keepers up at the Manor has bin putting poison down for the foxes again, and this yer dog got holt of it and died. It was a sad sight, it almost turned me."

"That must be the black setter they're advertising for down Burley," said Mary. "We seen a notice in Burley shop when we stopped there comin' yer. A pound reward."

"There, Joe," put in Mrs. Whicher excitedly, "you must goo back as fast as you can and tell them you found it."

"They wun't give me a pound for tellin' them the dog's dead."

"Maybe they'll give you somethink."

"Well, you tell the chavis to go and cover it up with leaves when they comes back, so's nobody else don't find it."

Joe left his wife to finish setting up the camp by herself and went off as fast as he could.

"That's where Joe arns shillings where other men arns pence," said Mrs. Whicher proudly. "He don't never let anythink pass."

"Fancy his stomach being that weak he can't touch a dead dog!" said Mary.

"He's funny that way. Not even a dead rabbit. And another funny thing. He can't a-bear anything rough or ticklesome next to his skin. He'd scratch hissself bleedin' if he was to sleep in blankets, and not for the same reason as some travellers scratches themselves, neither, you'll never find live-stock in our tent. He's tender-skinned and tender-hearted, Joe is. Faithy there takes after her dad. Perticler, she is."

"Look yer," said Mary. "I'll run down to Verely and cover up the dog. It may be some time afore Jessie and Fred gets back."

Mrs. Whicher thanked her and accepted the offer, explaining to her where to find the corpse. She herself was anxious to get a bit of washing done, and after that to get into Ringwood with a few pegs and bluebells that the children had picked this morning, which could be disposed of in the town.

Mary went off, leaving her neighbours in charge of the camp, and set her face once more for Pickett's Post. She was glad to be released from her guardianship of the camp and to escape to the woods which she loved. The air was fragrant, the sun hot on her face, the breeze sweet with the fragrance of a hundred moors. In spite of her unhappiness, her youth and

vitality asserted itself and sent hope pulsing through her veins. He would follow her, he would forgive her! And what then? inexorable reason cried sternly. The fact and always the fact was that between them was the great gulf that never could be bridged over. Even if he should forgive her, even if he should beg and implore her to marry him, she must refuse. Her weakness in giving in to him before appeared to her as weakness and foolishness and nothing else. He himself had viewed the gulf yesterday, he would realise it in the future, and more acutely as time went on, her pride whispered.

Then as she turned in across the heathery track towards the woods she loved, the flies buzzing round her in the sun intoxicated with the joy of living, the earth sweet and peaty as the May warmth drew the heart out of it, every heather twig pregnant and springy, every bird in the bushes trilling its soul out into the blue air, a second voice told her that she belonged to the forest, and that because she belonged to the forest which he loved that she would have a claim on him always, the claim of the earth which would receive his body when he died, the claim of the air he breathed, the roads leading north and south and allward which drew him with a lure he had never himself understood, the claim of the great trees with their beauty of trunk, branch and leaf, their heads lofty and erect, their roots set in the sweet core of their mother soil.

She did not formulate her consolation in words, not even in thought, but it was an emotion which possessed her, a comfort whispered by the buzzing, living, sun-bathed moor into her wild little heart, a something half-physical, half-spiritual which reassured her.

She reached the edge of the wood, now green with young bracken, for the brown tight croziers of a

month ago were unfolding into tender fronds though the fern had not yet reached its full height. The steady hum of myriads of insects filled the sun-barred aisles of the wood. Life, pulsing and intense, made the air murmurous, crowded every great trunk, every fallen leaf with minute industry. Every particle of living Nature was busy, intent on its own affairs, unconscious of other aims, other destinies, just as Mary was unconscious. She did not observe Nature, she absorbed it.

The dead dog was found, and Mary, troubled by no such fastidiousness as Joe Whicher, drew the body underneath a bush and covered it over with leaves and pieces of green. Its tongue was lolling out, horribly swollen. The poor beast had evidently fallen in its effort to hunt for water to allay its burning torture. The address on its collar was an address in Scotland; apparently its owner had not yet troubled to alter the name-plate. Suddenly the pathos of it struck the gypsy and loosened her own long pent-up tears. They rose to her eyes and rolled down her face unheeded. She cried quietly almost without knowing why. She had never wept for a dead animal before, yet her tears were not so much for herself as for the dog, whose joyous life had been so treacherously and painfully cut short.

Lyddon went to the Jeffs' cottage as soon as he had finished his work, and was told that Mary had been intercepted by her father that morning and had gone north instead of south. Mrs. Jeff was careful to say nothing of Miss Price's visit to him, but she drew her own conclusions from his look of blank amazement.

"No, she didn't leave no message for you," said Mrs. Jeff. "If I was you, I'd goo along after her. She's

funny-tempered, Mary is. When she gets sulky there ain't no draggin' anythink out of her. I ain't got nuthink against her though, she's a good gal and kushti-dikkin, too. You knows enough of our ta'ak to know what that is, I allow. There's no one yer-about that has a word to say about Mary bein' what she shouldn't be."

Lyddon listened with some impatience. So Miss Price had been talking already. He knew that Mrs. Jeff was longing to make confidences that she dared not make, and he walked away abruptly.

He had had enough of the village and Miss Price, and the tittle-tattle and the rest, which had only seemed endurable while Mary was there. He walked up to "Heaven's Gate" and told the startled old maid that she must find some one else to finish the coach-house as, to his regret, he was called away.

"I suppose one mustn't expect to keep a celebrated inventor working in one's stable for ever," said Miss Price caustically. "You are going to follow Mary James?"

"I am going to marry her. There has been enough talk about her and me, and it may as well be known now."

"You are going to add folly to folly. You will make Mary James miserable. The whole thing is madness. If you have trifled with the girl, go away and let her forget you and marry a man who will understand her."

"That is for Mary to decide."

"I pity Mary from all my heart."

"She may need your pity or not."

"Temper, temper! Let us be friends."

"I warn you, Miss Price, not to try to interfere in this."

"I warn you that I shall do all I can to prevent it. Not because of you, but because of her. I am coming to the conclusion that you should not marry any one."

Lyddon withdrew himself in not the best of humours. There were times when Miss Price irritated him into fury, there were other times when he saw her for what she was, a kindly, interfering, generous, eccentric old creature, with a shrewd brain and sympathies which warred with inborn prejudices.

He resolved to transfer his tent and belongings immediately to Verely. Mary would probably be there, Mrs. Jeff had hinted. He could get up there between seven and eight—he knew that gypsy camps are often dark and silent by half-past eight. But how was he to move? He had no cart, no hand-barrow on which to shift his things. He asked Joe Jeff, who told him that young Carpenter, who had married one of the Pidgeley girls, was going to Burley Street that evening, and might give him a lift for a trifle.

Lyddon went round with him to the Carpenters' cottage. Young Carpenter was feeding the pigs at the end of the little vegetable garden when they arrived, and replied that he wouldn't mind giving Mr. Allward a lift. He spoke with the somewhat surly independence of the thoroughbred Forester, whose suspicion of a stranger is innate. He would be starting in half-an-hour, he said.

The black sow whose trough he had just filled with pigwash, grunted greedily during the transaction, while her litter attacked her teats from both sides. The sty was filled with dried bracken, and was clean compared with those of most Forest pig-keepers.

"That's a fine sow," said Lyddon, wishing to propitiate the young man.

"I wouldn't part with she for ten pounds," said Carpenter. "She's the best sow yerabouts."

"How many trips have she had?" asked Joe Jeff.

"This is her fourth. I shall let her have another, then she'll be fit for bacon." His pride in the sow made him more genial. "The sows are best for bacon, look," he explained to Lyddon, "when they've had a trip or two. This one's bin a good sow. Some on 'em eats the young pigs and then they're good for nought but killing. If they eats one they eats all, and 'tisn't no good letting 'em have another trip after that. P'raps the little ones bites too hard with their teeth, but whatever 'tis, if she eats one she eats the martel litter. See that young sow in the next sty? She's wuth about four pounds. Pigs pays if you knaws how to kip them. When this young pig yer is three wiks old, he's wuth a pound. They costs a lot to kip, but there's profit in it."

It was arranged that the cart should be outside Miss Price's field in about twenty minutes, and Lyddon went back to take down his small tent and put his few belongings together. He stopped at the village shop to buy a loaf and a piece of bacon, however, and there he met Allus.

"You goin' after Mary?" the child asked, her sharp little face upturned to his.

"Yes, I am," said he. "Are you sorry?"

"Dunno," said she. "Look yer, Adam, I never telled on you when I seen you and Mary down in the hollies choomerin' each other. I lay you've got enough in your putsy to get mandy some of they pink pear-drops."

"I might," he said, and the pear-drops were duly obtained.

"You comin' back yer?" asked Allus.

"I don't think so."

She slipped her little brown monkey hand into his.

"You orter buy a nice van and travel up the country."

"That's what I'm going to do."

"I'd like to travel always," said the child. "When I'm growed big I shan't go into service like what Miss Price says I am to, I shall take a basket and go hawkin'. I shouldn't like for to be in a house and wear a cap on me head and never go out nowheres."

"It's a wretched life," said he, fully agreeing. "I think you're sensible, Allus. All the good meals and soft beds in the world wouldn't make up to you what you'd lost. Besides, you'd never be able to jump."

"More I should," she reflected conclusively.

Lyddon was obligingly driven by the young Forester right up to the verge of Verely, and having said his "good-night" and offered payment which was refused, he was left to the silence of the wood and to set about finding a camp in the twilight. He found the sight of their former camp—there was nothing to indicate that human beings had ever lived there but the discoloration of the grass. Mary's tent was not there, nor was she among the furze-bushes where small patches of ashes or the flutter of a discarded rag told of the travelling people. He chose a site for his own tent, set it up, and then ate his supper dispiritedly. As he sat smoking afterwards it seemed to him as if she must be present. The perfume of the wood smoke suggested her; the stillness and freshness of the great woods darkening in the chill of the spring dusk, the sleepy and stealthy rustlings and cracklings in bush and furze, the subtler forces of the forest were about him, embracing him, bewitching him, whispering that nothing else

mattered, and that he who had chosen to share the life of the forest had chosen the immortal life of the earth, had become part of that spirit which dwells in the earth and is more eternal than the gods and spirits invented by men. There was no moon, and when the last daylight had gone—which was not till close upon nine—the wood hedged him about with immeasurable shadows, the hollies and furze-bushes seemed to draw close to his tent in the darkness as if in dumb friendliness. It was not, he felt, that he humanised the forest in thus claiming its concern for him; rather he crept into its dim consciousness, which lies apart from human affairs and can never share them.

He tapped out his pipe—it seemed that the sudden noise disturbed the living creatures that were near but unaware of him—for there were startled movements in the undergrowth, a bird flew away overhead, a forest pony whose breathing had been audible before, started aside with a snort and sought safety.

Then he heard human footsteps, uncertain, slow, stopping now and again, moving shufflingly. He got up and called out—

“Who’s there?”

No answer. There was silence for a moment and then the footsteps retreated.

He walked in their direction, resolved to find out who the intruder was.

The footsteps quickened. He increased his pace; they broke into a run. He ran, too. Out on to the stretch of heather that lay between the woods and the high-road went the fugitive. He followed and got near enough in the darkness to see that it was a woman. She had crouched against a furze-bush hoping to elude her pursuer in its shadow, but he came up and she uttered a little cry.

"Mary!" he exclaimed in surprise.

"Oh, oh!" she panted. "I thought 'twas some of they furrin chaps what comes up yer from Kent. You skeered me crool. I didn't know your voice, Adam."

Her breast was still heaving, her face turned from him.

"What brought you here?" he said. "Did you know that I had come?"

"If I'd a-knowed, I wouldn't have come. Somethink drawed me down. I didn't want to goo to sleep. I wanted to walk somewheres. And so I come down yer to Verely. The trees is company when you've a-lived under 'em ever since you was borned. I didn't know as any one was atching yer, there wasn't no one when I comed yer this morning."

"What do you mean, you wouldn't have come? Why did you run off like that without giving me warning? Why didn't you come near me yesterday evening?"

She preserved a sulky silence.

"Come to my tent now, I want to have things out with you."

He turned and did not wait to see if she were following. She did so, however, after a moment's hesitation.

They reached the tent, he lit a candle and stuck it near the entrance, and placed a piece of sack over some straw so that she might sit down.

"Where are you camping?" he asked, in a matter-of-fact voice.

"Up against Forest Carner. Mile'n half from here."

"Your father is with you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm coming to see him to-morrow about our getting married."

"No, you ain't, then."

"I beg your pardon, I am."

"I ain't goin' to marry you."

"We've had that all out before. You're a naughty girl, Mary, and I am not pleased with you."

"'Cos I spoke rude to your raunie friend yesterday," said she with her head high, all penitence evaporating.

"Because you let me hunt for you for three hours last night."

She was silent, and gazed at the candle with her great brown eyes. They slowly filled with tears.

"I ain't fit for you," she said, her voice catching. "I didn't ought to have called her what I did."

"That wasn't what made me angry with you," he said. "It was for thinking that I was ashamed of you. You did think that. The reason I didn't want you to meet that woman was because she wouldn't understand you—nor you her, for the matter of that."

"But you likes her."

"Yes, I like her, and I owe a great deal to her, but that doesn't prevent me from seeing irritating qualities in her, just as she sees them in me, I expect."

Mary sat quite still, the tears gathering and falling down into her lap, her gaze still on the candle.

"It's no good," she said. "'Tis madness, you and me gettin' rummered. I sees it when I'm away from you, Adam. When you're close, look, all I thinks about is you, and that all you wants ain't enough for me to give you. You ain't never wanted me to beyave as I shouldn't. But if you did, I shouldn't stand against you. It ain't in me. You turns me to water. I'd cut off my hair and pull out my teeth if you was to ask me to. Silly, ain't it?"

She glanced up with one of her sweet smiles, though the tears were wet on her cheeks.

Lyddon bent over and took her dark hand and kissed it.

“Mary!”

She caught his arm and drew him down.

“Adam, Adam! What you done to me to make me such a fool?”

“Do you know, I felt you were in the wood just now?” he said, holding her close. “But you are the wood, and the wood is you, and I didn’t know which was which. That is why I love you, that is why I want you, Mary. No other woman in all the world could be part of myself in the way that you are.”

She understood what was tangible in his speech.

“No other woman?” she repeated breathlessly.

“None. None.”

She sighed happily, and pressed her flushed cheek against his.

“If we have children,” said he, half lost in fancy, “they will be like the world’s first children. They will be never taught the things that kill childhood.”

“I’d like ’em to go to the board school,” said Mary apprehensively. “I couldn’t larn ’em much, and you wouldn’t have no patience, Adam.”

He burst into a shout of laughter.

“Mary! Mary, you dear!”

She smiled uncomprehending, and then whispered shyly—

“I hopes we has lots of chavis, Adam.”

He kissed her.

“I bin so miserable to-day, Adam. I cried up yer in Verely as I ain’t a-cried since I was a chavi.”

A sudden gust put out the candle, but neither stirred.

"Did you cook a nice bit of supper to-night?" she asked. "I don't see no fire."

"I had some bread-and-cheese."

"That ain't nothin' for a man what has bin workin' all day. Let me make you a bit of a yog now and have somethink tasty."

He released her.

"No, it's too late. Mary, you ought to be getting back."

"I don't want to go," she said.

"You've got to go, child. I shall be round to see your father early to-morrow morning."

She was silent.

"Mary, come!"

She looked at him with wistfulness and a smiling shyness in her eyes as he re-lit the candle and set it out of the draught.

"Ain't I to stay any longer, Adam?" she said reluctantly, in her hoarse coaxing gypsyish voice.

He flushed, but remained inexorable. She looked such a child, such a lovely child, in the semi-lit tent, her dark hair about the olive oval of her face, her earrings catching the gold of the candle-flame, her great soft eyes alight and shameless in their innocent passion.

"No, no, child."

The spell broke, her eyes clouded, she sat back.

"Well, then——" she said.

"Well, what?"

"Good-night, Adam."

She rose.

"I'm coming with you," he replied, blowing out the light.

They walked together till they came out on the open moor. Mary suffered him to hold her arm. The faint

starlight lit their way, and they struck the cart-track which led up to the high-road.

"Why don't you say nothing?" she asked presently.

"I was thinking."

"Of me?"

"Yes."

"And you really koms me, tachipen?"

The clutch on her arm tightened.

"Yes, I really love you, you little savage."

"I ain't savage," she said, piqued, taking the word to mean fierce.

"You are my tame gypsy, aren't you?"

"I'm anything you wants me to be, Adam."

"Yes."

"Up ag'in the trees there, there's a nightingale's nest with three eggs in it."

"Where?"

"There, up that hedge, round the kungsi. Hush, there it goes. The cock's a-singin'. I likes to hear 'em."

They stood still for a moment, the night-sweetness of the moor blown towards them on a light wind from the sea. The pure roulades and liquid phrases of the nightingale were borne to them where they stood on the road.

"Sounds a'most as if there was words to it," said Mary, after a pause.

"Down in Normandy country people say that this is what the nightingale says. You listen, and tell me if you think it is like.

"Le bon Dieu m'a donné une femme
Que j'ai tant, tant, tant battue,
Et s'il m'en donne une autre
Je ne la batterai plus, plus, plus, plus,
Qu'un petit, qu'un petit, qu'un petit."

"What's that?"

"Peasant talk down there."

"It's as deep as our talk, Adam. What do it all mean?"

He translated it for her.

"That ain't what he says," Mary commented disdainfully.

"Well, what does he say, do you think?"

She was silent for a moment while the clear notes sounded a little further away.

"There isn't no words for it," she said at length.

"It's just that he feels the spring and that bubblin' out of him. He's so happy about his eggs and his nest and that, that he couldn't help singin' if he tried. There's times when every one feels like that."

"And when do you feel like that, then?"

She pressed close to him and spoke hoarsely.

"When I'm with you, Adam."

CHAPTER XX

MISS PRICE was not the woman to give up an enterprise when once she had undertaken it. A letter which she received the morning after her interview with Mrs. Jeff decided her to instant action. She ordered breakfast at seven, and the pony-cart to be ready at a quarter to eight. She then drove off in the direction of Burley. She knew the habits of the gypsies well enough to be sure that if she did not find the Jameses at Verely, she would probably come upon them at Forest Corner. She was saved the trouble of hunting Verely, however, by an encounter with a poor travelling tinker and his family, who had just settled at the edge of the wood. The children had already scouted the surroundings, and declared there were no other camps near by; unless 'twas a single man "what had gone off with his things in a cart that morning early." Miss Price thanked the ragged family, distributed some pennies among the smaller fry, and turned her pony's head towards the main road again.

If she did not find the Jameses at Forest Corner, she would have to postpone her visit till another day, and gather what information she could from gypsies on the road as to their whereabouts. They might be by Hatchett's Pond, or Beaulieu Rails, where Sam went frequently; or Sam might have mysterious business in the north of the Forest. She did not think that Mrs. Jeff would purposely have misled her as to the direction they had taken.

She flicked the pony and clucked to it encourag-

ingly, shaking the reins on its fat back. She was dressed with her usual contempt for fine raiment. The ancient straw was on her head, she wore a pair of dog-skin gloves, which often served her when gardening, and her whole figure was enveloped in a grey dust-cloak of uncertain age. The pony moved complacently up the long, sunny, white road to Pickett's Post. It needed constant reminders from its mistress, who gave them apologetically. Miss Price had sandwiches and a bottle of milk at the bottom of the governess cart, and a feed for the pony. Meanwhile the old maid gave herself up to happy enjoyment of the fresh, beautiful air and the view across the moor. She did not admit that the wide prospect excelled her own over the Avon valley, but she appreciated it in a large-minded spirit. Arrived at the top of the hill near the spot where the gallows had stood in ancient times, she whipped up the pony and set off down the Ringwood road. Two of the Whicher children sat on the top of the bank at the turning to Forest Corner; they had been left in charge of the tents while their father and mother pursued their various avocations. The board school authorities cannot catch these little vagrants, but they are as a rule far quicker of tongue, brain and hand than the country children. There was a duet of "Good-morning, my lady," in response to Miss Price's greeting, and when she inquired if the Jameses were encamped there, the answer came quick and smilingly, with an offer of guidance to the spot.

Miss Price declined, but promised the children money for sweets if they would hold the pony's head, while she found her way herself through the bushes. She followed the path round the field, and soon the drab roofs of the bee-hive tents, patched and smoky, met her eyes above the gold of the gorse.

The first proved to be the Whichers. There were two a little further on, and a donkey limping, hobbled at a little distance.

"Mary James!" shouted Miss Price.

There was silence for a minute, and then Mary's head, bound about by a bright kerchief, rose out of the division between the two tents.

"Come out a minute, my dear," said Miss Price across the furze bushes. "I want to speak to you."

"Yes, my lady," said Mary obediently, and threaded her way through to the knoll upon which the old lady stood. Miss Price was aware of a subtle difference in the girl. Her cheeks were flushed and fuller, her eyes, always her best feature, brighter than ever, her print frock tidy and her apron clean. Miss Price admitted to herself that Mary had grown into a most handsome and graceful girl. "There's a look of breeding about some of these gypsy women," thought the old maid. "I don't altogether wonder at Richard Lyddon."

"Have you anything for me to sit on?" Miss Price asked. "I'm afraid of the damp, and I want to have a good talk with you."

"Will you come into the tent, my lady?"

"Are you alone?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Then I will, with pleasure. It isn't the first time that I've sat in your father's tent. I am glad that your father has never taken to living in a cottage. There are far too many houses about. All this building is ruining the Forest."

"He can't a-bear sleeping with a roof over his head," Mary replied, leading the way to the tent. Straw and dried bracken overspread with a neat piece of carpet

covered its floor. Mary pulled out a bundle for Miss Price to lean against, and then sat down cross-legged herself in gypsy fashion.

“I’m not going to beat about the bush, Mary James,” began Miss Price, drawing off the dogskin gloves and smoothing them out on her lap. “I’ve known you since you were a small baby—a tiny, dark little thing—in your mother’s arms, and she was lying in a van just below St. Catherine’s Hill. I brought her over some comforts, poor soul, and very pleased she was. Ah, yes, you don’t remember that, Mary. Your people used to think a lot of themselves in those days, and there were gypsies of the real old sort about, who looked down on the half-breeds. Your own mother followed the good old gypsy custom, and had all the plates and dishes used by her during her confinement broken up afterwards so that no one should use them.”

“Yes,” said Mary, her eyes wide with interest. “The old folks used to do that. The ‘poggerin’ opray,’ they used to call it.”

“I’ve always done what I could for your people,” continued Miss Price impressively, “just as my father did before me. I’ve often heard him say that he never missed a chicken or a wisp of hay, however near the gypsies were camped, because they were so grateful to him. I’m telling you all this, my dear, to show you that I wish you well and that I think highly of your people.”

“You always bin very good to us, my lady,” Mary returned.

“Well, in return, I want you to be truthful with me. What is this about Mr. Lyddon—whom your people call Allward?”

Mary hesitated, her face flushing, and her gaze fell

on her dark hands. Miss Price's eyes followed, and she gave a start.

"Bless me! you're not married already!"

There was a plain gold ring on Mary's third finger of the left hand.

"Not ezackly, my lady," said Mary shyly. "Adam, he made me put this on this marning. He come up yer and talked to father, and father he gave me to him like what mother's father gived her to father, and we jumped the broomstick. We're to get married proper as soon as the bands¹ are put up. Father gone to ast the captain what's camped down in Burley about it."

"What captain?"

"The Church Army captain. He goes around marryin' travellers, look, my lady, and when he finds some in the bushes what's living together without gettin' married in church, he gives 'em copper rings what he keeps in his pocket, and gets 'em married in church."

Miss Price breathed more freely.

"Then you are not legally married? You are not living together?"

"He ain't ast me to yet, my lady."

"You must remember this gypsy marriage doesn't count in the eye of the law."

"No, my lady," said Mary submissively.

"The other marriage must never take place."

Mary's great eyes were frightened now, and she said nothing.

"Where is Mr. Lyddon?"

"He's gone to Ringwood to see about getting a van for us to live in. There's a man wants to sell one down there."

¹ To the uneducated as well as to the gypsy the word 'banns' is known as "bands," implying the bonds or binding of marriage.

"Then he won't be back yet."

"No, my lady."

"Well, Mary, I want to tell you why you can't marry this man. To begin with, he comes of gentle-people, and marriages between people of your sort and gentlemen are hardly ever a success. But that's not the real reason. He is not an ordinary man. He is a clever man, a man whose brains may be useful to his country. He is like lots of other clever people, a little mad, and therefore he is unreliable. He will make you very unhappy one of these days. He has taken up this life, he has taken up with you, in a freakish impulse. He may do something totally different in a freak, too, and where would you be? You may think it fine to marry some one who has a little money and is different from your own men-folk, but one of these days you'll be lonely, and wish you had kept to the good gypsy rule and married one of your own blood, or at any rate of your own way of life."

"He don't want to live no different to what I bin livin'," said Mary.

"Not at present, perhaps," said Miss Price. "But you must remember that you will be cutting him off from his old friends, and that some day he may regret it."

"He ain't one to change," said Mary doggedly.

"Not one to change? My dear child, even with the slight knowledge I possess of him, I have learnt that he has had as many changes as a chameleon. Engaged to be married to a girl, and when that was broken off marrying some one else. Still continuing the friendship with the first girl, and nearly dragging her into the divorce courts with him through thoughtlessness of her reputation; leading her to think that he would marry her when he was free, and then carry-

ing on with you—if you don't call such a man unstable as water—— Well, they all are, more or less. Do you suppose he will be perfectly contented when he has married you? There are some men who are always wanting lands beyond the stars, and I believe he is one of them. He will be talking in one language and you in another, and some day he'll wake up to the fact and want to wander off somewhere else. With you gypsy people wandering is physical, something drives your legs along the roads, you migrate like the birds do, just because you don't know why. With him it is spiritual. One day you may irritate each other. I appeal to you, for your own happiness, to leave him, and to let him free. If he ever marries, and I hope he never will, he should marry some one whom he cannot make miserable."

Miss Price was conscious of Jesuitical reasoning in her statement of the case. Only one thing was paramount in her mind. She honestly disbelieved in such a marriage, and she meant to stop it even if she painted Lyddon blacker than he deserved. She felt that she was doing them both a service. She had made up her mind about Lyddon, and labelled him; like many women she was entirely negligent of the unexpected and subtler elements of the case. Mary understood only one-half of what she had said.

"What lady was that he was goin' to marry?" she asked in a stifled voice.

"The lady who came to see him the other day."

"And do she want to marry him still?"

Miss Price hesitated. "I have reason to think so."

Mary was silent. A dull resentment against Lyddon arose in her heart that he had not told her explicitly of his past relations with the woman. He must have

loved her once since he had been about to marry her—he must have kissed her. A dull red flushed her cheek. She wished she could have struck down the raunie who had come and patronised her. Tell her fortune! The brazen creature! Hunting him down in his tent. Brazen! Brazen! with her fine clothes and her smiling face!

“Well?” said Miss Price.

“I’m a-thinkin’,” replied Mary sullenly.

All her fears of the former day, fanned by her suspicious resentment, came crowding in upon her. Miss Price seemed to embody them, to make them concrete.

Then she said hoarsely and defiantly—

“He don’t kom her; he won’t want her like what he wants me.”

“You gypsy girls know something of men, Mary, and you know as well as I do that what a man wants most is often that which is nearest. If one public-house is nearer than another, a man gets a habit of dropping in there for his beer rather than into the one that’s further away. Mr. Lyddon has seen a lot of you, Mary. Your pretty face has made him forget himself. You’ll be doing yourself an injury by marrying him, and you’ll be injuring him too. In a word, it isn’t suitable for a man like that to be marrying a traveller girl. You know yourself that it isn’t, now don’t you?”

“My dad’s a-given me to him,” said Mary.

“That doesn’t mean anything. If he thought that binding, he wouldn’t be wanting to get married in church as well, would he?”

Mary made no reply.

“If he were one of your own people, it would be different. I should say that if you’d jumped the broomstick that it was more or less binding. It’s an

old custom, and old customs must be respected. But it's not his custom."

Mary said nothing. She wanted to run away from this merciless flaying of her heart, to escape, to leave it all.

The surgeon continued, "I've a letter here, Mary, which will give you an opportunity to get away and think it all over. You've never left the Forest, and you'll appreciate it all the more for being away for a time. A friend of mine in Bournemouth has written to me to know if I can send her a Thorneyhill girl to train for domestic service. She's a kind woman, and it won't do you any harm to learn how to cook and do housework now that so many of you have taken to living in cottages. You'll marry some day, and it may be useful to you. I will take you over myself and get your outfit, and see you settled in."

Miss Price's tone was brisk and energetic, and Mary quailed before it.

"I don't want to, my lady," she replied faintly.

"Nonsense," said Miss Price. "You'll thank me one day. Now come along, Mary James. I've wasted the morning over you, and I may as well spend the afternoon on you too. We can drive on to Ringwood; I'll put the pony up at the Crown, and we'll get the train in to Bournemouth. There's no time like the present."

"I ain't a-goin'," said Mary, trembling. It was something unheard of in Thorneyhill to brave Miss Price directly. She might be circumvented, but defied, never.

"Then you are an ungrateful, shameless girl," said Miss Price. "I thought better of you. I wish your mother were alive. She was a sensible woman. A fine lot you care for Mr. Lyddon, to ruin him by marrying

him. Tie him up, ruin him and yourself. Are you going to tell me there's a reason for your getting married in such a hurry?"

"He ain't never treated me as he shouldn't," said Mary resentfully, tears standing in her eyes.

"That's not what they say in the village, Mary. Are you sure you're speaking the truth? If you don't know it, Mr. Lyddon does, and that's why he thinks himself obliged to marry you."

Miss Price had thoroughly lost her temper.

Mary watched her rise, draw on the shabby gloves and leave the tent.

The old maid walked stiffly through the gorse bushes, and along the track till she came to where the Whicher children stood holding the pony's bridle-rein. Then she turned back on a sudden impulse. Arrived at the tent she looked in, and saw Mary lying prone on the straw, face downwards. Miss Price bent down and patted her on the shoulder.

"I've spoken hastily, Mary. If you've made up your mind, my dear, I have not the right to say anything. But if you ever get into trouble, or if you are ever in difficulties, just let me know. There, there, child, don't begin to cry like that."

Mary sat up suddenly, and threw back her hair with a passionate gesture.

"I'm a fool, I'm a fool," she cried. "I knowed all along it was foolishness. My dearie duvvel, my dearie duvvel! I runned away from him once—I did."

Miss Price was puzzled. Mary almost pushed her aside, and wiping her eyes on her apron, began hastily to gather her things together. The broken comb, the backless brush, her few garments, her cigar-box full of treasures, she swept them all together and tied them up in a bundle. Then she reached for the hat

trimmed with tawdry flowers, which she had worn to the races, and put it on her head.

“I’m ready!” she said fiercely.

“You are coming?”

“Yes, I’m a-comin’,” answered Mary.

CHAPTER XXI

THE events of that day were like a dream to Mary. She was taken to shops by Miss Price and fitted out with a servant's wardrobe and more underclothes than she had ever had before in her life, and then, having left her old clothes to be sent to her aunt in Thorney-hill, was arrayed in the unaccustomed black of her new calling, and after a hasty meal in a restaurant, was taken in a tram-car by her indefatigable patroness to a house in West Bournemouth. It was one of a long row of red-brick gabled villas, each trying to achieve a distinctive note and each failing. This house was called "Windermere," and it boasted a small front garden and three fir-trees. A fair girl in white cap and apron opened the door, and Mary was left sitting in the hall while Miss Price was ushered into the drawing-room. The gypsy was half-dazed with fright and bewilderment. The air of the house was stifling and stale, no windows were open, and the tick-tock of the hall-clock and the aggressive appearance of the hall-stand with its umbrellas, its clothes-brush, its rain-cloak, seemed menacing and oppressive.

An elderly lady had rustled down the stairs with an inquiring glance at Mary, and had disappeared into the drawing-room, and Mary could hear the murmur of their voices, but not what they were saying. After a while the fair girl in cap and apron came and peeped out at her from a door communicating with the back regions. She said—

"You come after the place?"

Mary could scarcely command her dry tongue to whisper "Yes" in a frightened voice.

"She ain't bad. Religious and all that. Comes down sharp on you if there ain't enough left of the joint. She don't eat nothin' herself and spect's you to eat nothin', too. Bread-an'-butter's what she'd like you to live on, and cocoa. I 'ate cocoa. Filthy stuff! This your first place?"

"Yes."

"She always gets fresh 'ands if she can. Cheaper. Trainin' 'em she calls it. I'm leavin' in three weeks to get married. Tram conductor name of 'Ogg. There ain't too much to do here, that's one blessin'. Mrs. Jason, the char, comes in of a Saturday and Wednesday to clean out. You got a young man?"

Mary was silent.

"Well, if you 'ave, don't you let 'er know. She can't a-bear you to 'ave a bit of fun with a man. She won't let mine come near the 'ouse, that's when she's in. When she's not——"

The girl's face dimpled, but a movement in the drawing-room at this juncture frightened the fair-headed maid back into her own domain. The door opened, and Miss Price summoned Mary within.

Mary, previously instructed by Miss Price to say, "Yes, ma'am" instead of "Yes, my lady," found herself required to use little more than that formula. Miss Price did most of the talking and supplied her answers, prompting a "Yes, ma'am" with "Can't you, Mary?" or "Isn't that so, Mary?"

Miss Johnson, the grey-haired mistress of the house, told Mary that she had decided to give her a trial, and that Louisa, her present maid, would put her in the way of things before she left to get married. She said that she always took a mother's care of the girls in her

house, and endeavoured to give them good Christian surroundings and a kind home. The last girl she had had from Thorneyhill had proved a quick good girl, and had left to better herself. She hoped that Mary would be as ready to learn.

"Yes, ma'am," said Mary, her head aching, and her instinct being to run out through the door and away as hard as she could go.

"You can accompany Miss Price to the door, Mary," said Miss Johnson. "I understand that your clothes have only just been bought and are being sent up from the shop presently. I hope you are properly grateful to Miss Price for her kindness and generosity to you."

"Yes, ma'am," answered Mary automatically.

In the hall Miss Price took her brown, silver-ringed hand.

"Good-bye, Mary, my dear. I've done the best I could for you, and your father will find the message pinned up in the tent where we put it. It is best to give them no address for the present. If you need anything, or are in any difficulty, write to me. I dare say it will be hard for you at first, but a little hard discipline is good for us. I've had plenty myself. Miss Johnson is a kind woman if you take her the right way. I'll tell your Aunt Matilda Jeff what I have done to-night. I must be going now to catch my train back to Ringwood. Good-bye, my dear, be a good child."

Mary choked down a sob in her throat and muttered a "Yes, my lady," and then she burst out—

"Oh, take me with you, my lady. I can't abear this place. I can't breathe proper yer. I won't go near Adam if you'll take me back along with you. I can't abear this."

"Nonsense, Mary. You must control yourself.

Now be a good girl and be brave. There are lots of gypsy girls in service who've done well: one of the Pidgeley girls, one of the Whites. You'll soon get accustomed to it."

Mary heard the door close on her with a great sinking of the heart. She felt like a trapped rabbit, her heart beating wildly, her eyes full of the fear of death.

"Louisa will show you your room, Mary," said Miss Johnson, coming out into the hall. "You will share it with her for the present; I shall put in a camp-bed for you as Louisa's is narrow as it is. Louisa! take Mary upstairs."

Mary followed the fair-haired maid up the stairs and into a tiny room, the window of which was tightly closed. One small chest of drawers and a row of pegs were full of Louisa's clothes.

"I dunno where the other bed'll go!" said that damsel. "Or where your box 'll go, either. These beds is that low you can't even get an 'at-box underneath. We'll 'ave to manage some'ow, though."

The rest of the day was part of an evil dream. Mary did what she was told, but like a sleep-walker. The fair girl put her down as homesick and was merciful to her, having been through that misery herself long ago. At ten the girls went in for evening prayers before locking up the house, and then Mary went up to bed.

That night! Could she ever forget it! To her, accustomed to sleep with nothing but a brown blanket between her and the sky, and the wind in the tree-tops as lullaby, the room with its closed window was a veritable Black Hole of Calcutta. Feverish with heat and misery she tossed from side to side, hating the sensation of the sheets next to her, hating the roof which weighed down upon her as if it were ready to

crush her; a wild creature in a trap, frightened and wretched. Then the thought of Adam came to torment her. To have left him without a word of explanation: how could she have done it? She yearned after him fiercely, she reached after him in the darkness with hot arms, saying, "Forgive me, Adam! I only done it for you, because I loves you better'n I loves myself." A funny way of showing love, to leave the man she told herself, and then reproached herself for looking backwards. It was the only way, and Miss Price's coming was the finger of Fate to point her destiny. Only Mary did not call it destiny, she would not have known the meaning of such terms. But fatalism, or rather bowing to circumstances, was strong in her outcast blood. It was not to be, and what was not to be was ordained long before she had been born in the yellow caravan under the hill.

She awoke the next morning after a tardy sleep with an aching head and heavy eyes. The fair girl had to shake her into consciousness.

"It's six o'clock! How you do sleep!"

Mary's day was chiefly spent in the hot kitchen. The smell of food, the lack of air, the pressure of the walls was as great a torture to her as it had been the day before. If only she could have done her cooking out-of-doors! And the sun was shining outside. She missed the buzz and soundful silence of the great moor; she missed the popping of the gorse pods, the intrusion of wild bees. But she stuck to it doggedly and her common-sense helped her to understand when Louisa explained the peculiarities of the oven and such matters.

"Don't you never go out?" she asked once wistfully, standing by the back door when it stood open for a minute.

"Every Wednesday hevening from eight to ten, and every Sunday afternoon, after I've laid the tea and put the kettle on," said Louisa promptly.

"Then you never goes out but once a week when the sun is a-shinin'?" Mary cried aghast.

"Oo cares about the sun as long as you gets your time off? I want to be off with Mr. 'Ogg, that's all I cares. Sun? There's too much sun in this kitchen to please me. It gets fairly roastin' of an afternoon when the sun's on this side of the 'ouse."

But Mary's heart sank. She might as well be in prison. To have rolled herself a cigarette and smoked it would have soothed her, but she knew that this would be forbidden in such a house. It was then that the thought of escape first dawned upon her. It would kill her to stop here. She would earn money to pay back Miss Price for what she had spent upon her somehow, and she need not let any one know where she was. Strawberrying was soon coming on, she could earn enough to keep herself for some months if they had a lucky season. The idea had no sooner germinated than it grew and grew. She must escape, somehow and somewhen, she must, she must!

"I tell you what you look like," said Louisa suddenly. "I've been puzzlin' over it ever since I first saw you. You're the livin' image of one of the gypsy girls that sells flowers down there in the Square."

Mary had been warned by Miss Johnson not to mention that she was a gypsy, and she held her tongue now.

"You needn't mind that," said Louisa kindly, "they're very 'andsome. A rough lot, they are. Most of 'em lives Parkestone way, near Constitution Hill. I wouldn't go round there after dark if you was to pay me."

The bell rang and interrupted Louisa, and she obeyed its summons.

"Bother! Got to take this parcel to the post," she grumbled. "Why can't the old girl take it out herself?"

"Let me take it," said Mary eagerly.

"You don't know where the office is. Well, there's no reason you shouldn't. First turning to the left, and then along to the right till you comes to a big tobacconist's at the corner. That's the nearest. 'Urry up, because there's all that silver to be cleaned."

Mary ran upstairs, put on the sober hat which Miss Price had chosen for her, and went out by the back door bearing the parcel and the sixpence which was to pay for the stamp. The sun greeted her outside, the breeze brought her, even in this town, the odour of the firs. She walked along almost joyously, for the pleasure of feeling the fresh air against her cheek. The post office was found and the parcel despatched. It cost fourpence. Mary came outside and stood at the door irresolutely. She saw a woman on the other side of the road with a basket of flowers on her arm. The shawl, the slouch, the red-brown skin, the gold earrings told Mary that one of her people was before her. She crossed the road quickly, and coming up to the woman, touched her arm.

"You want some flowers, my dear?" said the woman coaxingly. "Nice and cheap, beautiful flowers to-day. I'll sell them cheap to you because of your nice brown eyes, my darling, and tell you something lucky that I see in them, too, if you'll let me."

"You one of the Heavenly Bottom lot?" asked Mary breathlessly.

"Yes, my dear, that's whar I lives."

"Is Gerania Smith there?"

"She wuz, dearie, she wuz, but she's gone up country. Who might you be? You've a Romany look yourself, I lay you have."

"I'm Mary James."

"What old Sam James's gal? "

"Awali," said Mary, using the gypsy "yes."

"Dordi, dordi! and so you've gone into sarvice! Well, you'd best come and dikk us all one of these yer divvuses, and we'll pee a little levina and ker a bit of peeass. So you're old Sam James's gal. A nice-lookin' gal you've a-growed, my dear, a real rinkeni kauli young raunie! Where's yer dad, then, and what's he a-doin' of? "

"He's up at Forest Carner," said Mary.

"And how d'ye like sarvice, my darling? "

"I 'ate it," said Mary, and her eyes filled with tears. The sound of the gypsy voice made her homesick and miserable.

"You take my advice and don't you stay," said the woman in a low voice. "There's as much money to be made by hawkin' as ever there is in sarvice, and no b—— gauji to be over you. Sarvice ain't made for our people. Gaujis is made different. What they likes ain't what we likes."

"I'm going to run off," said Mary, her tears drying and her soul firing.

"That's right, my darling, you do it now and you'll never repent. Your cousin, Gerany Smith's darter, lives up there in Heavenly Bottom, and she'll give you a roof to your head, I'll warr'nt. You got some money? "

"Tuppence that ain't mine," said Mary, who held the change out of the sixpence in her hand.

"She'll never miss tuppence. If you goes off sudden you loses your wages, so you take my advice and kip what you can. Yer's another tuppence to buy some-

think to eat. Off you go, my gal, and lucky's the day. When yer stardy's on yer sherro you're well thatched, ain't you. You knows the way to Heavenly Bottom?"

"Yes," said Mary. "But I never bin there."

"Well, you go straight to your cousin and tell her I sent you. She lives in a van and a shed there, any one 'll tell you. I got to go off now, but I'll see you to-night."

She gave Mary a kindly warming look out of her cunning and sun-wrinkled eyes, wise with gypsy wisdom, and went off, her basket supported against her hip. Mary stood still awhile as if hypnotised and then turned slowly back towards "Windermere." The wind blew the city dust in her face, people passed her intent on their own business. She was in the Christchurch Road, and the trams were passing. Again she paused without noticing where she stood. A tram approaching drew up and the conductor looked at her inquiringly, then she realised that she was beside a post marked "Trams stop here if required."

Almost without volition she ran forward and got into the car, into which the conductor helped her as the car went off. "Where to?" he was saying the moment afterwards.

"Constitution Hill," Mary said, and wondered if she had spoken or if something or some one had used her lips.

"Change at the Square," said the conductor briefly, and clipped her ticket.

Gradually the full meaning of her escape dawned upon the girl. She had broken for ever the bonds of servitude. She had burnt her boats behind her. As regards Miss Price, she felt compunction, but not shame. Miss Price had asked the impossible of her. The letter of her law Mary had been unable to keep. In the spirit

she would obey her by keeping away from Adam. Miss Price had meant well by her, but she had not understood the colossal impossibility of Mary's ever leading the life for which she had been destined.

"I should a-died if I'd a-stopped there," Mary thought to herself passionately.

At the Square she got out and changed into an Upper Parkestone car. There was no fear, no mis-giving in her now, only a riotous relief. Even Adam receded into the background for the time. Arrived at Constitution Hill she asked her way, and had to retrace road she had already covered in the car, then turn down towards the long valley that runs into Bournemouth by way of a mean street of miserable brick houses outside which tattered women gossiped. There was a waste boggy patch between the two hills, crossed here and there by half-made roads, blotted here and there by rubbish heaps, flanked on either side by freshly built houses foredoomed to be slums. But in the middle of this dreary wilderness were a few huts, some dozen caravans, from whose chimneys smoke went up here and there, and a ragged tent or two. There was a patch of gorse, too, and some bog-myrtle where Mary, approaching the place unwittingly from the wrong side, had to jump a stream in which a rusty kettle was floating.

It was a borderland, a pitiful strip of dingy desert within the sordid precincts of civilisation. The town already swallowed it, or rather, held it engorged. In the red-brick cottages on either side dwelt folk who were neither gypsy nor peasant; half-breed people, half tramp, half scamp, polluted with town life, with wilder blood in their veins, the despair of the curates who thought it their business to visit and minister to them.

Mary went towards the nearest caravan and asked a

filthy child with black hair and eyes like brown velvet where Julia White lived. The child pointed her out a van at a little distance. It was set beside a zinc hut, in front of which a small garden blossomed. Mary picked her way across to it, and the small child, sharp as a ferret, preceded her and shouted that a gal wanted to see Mrs. White. The door of the hut was already open, and a handsome haggard young woman looked out, a baby at her half-bared breast.

"Who is it?" she began, and then burst out with, "Lord bless us and save us, it's Mary James! Come in, come in and sit down. Well, yer's a bit of bokkt! I didn't dar to go to Barnmouth to-day because I come over so funny this marning, and if I'd a-gone I'd a-missed you! Dear Lord!"

"Isn't you well, then?" asked Mary.

"It's the chavis, Mary, my dear. They comes so fast they takes the life out o' you. Six I've had in five year, one at the burk and the other in the pur, and hawkin' flowers all day, and then yer mush wonders why you ain't what you used to be! Gawd! what a life!"

At her request Mary came in and sat within the hut on a packing-case covered with dirty cretonne. A fire in an iron receptacle such as night workmen use stood in one corner, and over it a kettle suspended by an iron stake driven into the ground gypsy fashion.

Three small children, grimy and pretty, sat on the earthen floor, and were chased outside by their mother who declared she never had no peace, not a minnit, all day long and all night long.

"And what's bro't you yer?" Mary was asked at last, when the wailing of the baby deprived momentarily of its solace was stopped by a renewal of the same.

Mary explained that she had run away from service

in Bournemouth. She made no mention of the reason which had induced her to enter such a life.

"Well, I don't blame you neither," said the young mother reflectively, hugging her greedy bundle. "No, I can't say as I does. It's no life for us, bro't up like we'd a-bin. Marriage is 'ard, but you can chinger with your man even if he beats you, and knock about the chavis if you feels like it. But in service, no matter what you feels, it's 'Yes, m'm,' and 'No, m'm,' and all that. And never a drop o' beer. It's no life for us. Whatever made you go and do it for?"

"Miss Price, a raunie what lives up in Tharneyhill, come for me and took me," said Mary.

"Well, you *was* a dinn to let her. What you goin' to do now?"

"I dunno," Mary replied. "I darn't goo back to my dad."

"You'd best bide yer a bit, till the strawberry season comes and then go up country along with the rest of us. You 'elp me with the chavis and I'll feed yer all right. Besides, if you got your licence for hawkin' in Christchurch you could go from yer just easy as from Tharneyhill. My mush 'll not mind your biding with us. Oh, lordy, lordy! my yed! it do ache crool! there was a weddin' yesterday, and the dancing that went on, all the gals and boys! it was a time, I can tell you. But the levina we a-peed! I tell you half of 'em was drunk the time we'd finished, and some of 'em is sleepin' it off now. I can't carry the drink like what I used to, the second pint does for me, and this marning I've a yed on fire, and the tikno (baby) yer cryin' half the night till his dad said he'd brain us all!"

"Who was married?" Mary asked.

"A gal what lives up there on the hill, name of

Stace, father's got steam-horses. Come to think of it, you know Alf Stace, don't you? He was a-talkin' of you yesterday when he got free-spoken with the levina. Well, this Stace gal, Vi'let they calls her, is marryin' a man name of Miles—rags and bones and bottles and that, doin' well he is."

Mary listened half-bewildered by her cousin's talk. The gypsies who haunt the town are very different from those who live in the forest. They are not so clean, a good deal more sophisticated and less sober. And yet, thanks to their blood, the men and women rarely coarsen. Julia had still a beautiful skin and black-fringed eyes of an exquisite greenish-grey. The old women never degenerate into drink-sodden fat like the slum-women.

"Where's Alf now?" asked Mary. She felt as though she would be almost glad to see her admirer, just because he was associated with familiar things.

"Over at his dad's. He's flush just now. Made a nice little heap of vongar fightin'. When he's trainin' not a drop does he touch. They say he'll be took up on the 'alls in London next. There was a man from London what come to watch him fight at a pictsher palace darn Pokesdarn. Dordi! he can use his morleys! You remember old Daniel Lee? Noah's father, what lived to be a hundred? *He* used to be a proper kooren-gro in his time, I've heard my dad say. He'd 'a' stood up to Alf, I warr'nt. I just remembers him, a great hairy gairo he was, as kaulo as that dress of yourn, and with thick white hairs all over his chest; higher nor that door-post by half a foot."

At this point the kettle boiled over and Julia began to prepare a midday meal of bread-and-cheese and tea. Her man was out and wouldn't be back till evening, so that the round meal was to be eaten then.

Mary ate heartily and so did the children, readmitted into the hut. The question of her night-quarters was brought up, and Mary begged for a few sacks and rods so that she might make herself a tent. That was the form of habitation that instinct taught her to like best. In a tent, with a blanket to cover her, she would feel safety and independence. In the end she had her way and a small plot of rising ground selected, she erected her poor little shelter in spite of the rusty tins and rubbish lying about and the difficulties of such a site.

The new hat she wore, at her cousin's advice, she took up to an old-clothes shop and sold for two shillings. The dress fetched ten. With a few shillings of that she bought a battered straw of less aggressive respectability and a second-hand blouse and skirt; the rest of the money was tied up in a kerchief after a few necessary purchases had been made. But the Mary of the bright beads and golden earrings was no more, for her trinkets lay in her box at "Windermere," and never would she dare to fetch them. She also pawned her new coat; she would need ready money and could easily redeem it when she had earned a little. She had wild notions of eventually sending all her new clothes, or rather the monetary value of them, back to Miss Price, but that, for the present, was impossible. Lyddon's rings that hung round her neck next her skin she would send back, too, and ask Miss Price to deliver them. On the morrow she could buy her flowers with the rest, visit her old customers in Christchurch, and begin to earn regularly again.

She was coming down the hill from her expedition when she met Alf. He looked lethargic after the festivities of the day before, but brightened when he saw her, and began to walk beside her and to pour out a string of questions as to why she was there. He had

met her cousin as he was loafing round the bottom, and had come up to seek for Mary at once. Mary answered his questions as best she could. She thought to have been pleased to see Alf, but the sight of him reminded her of the Point to Point races and of Adam. And somehow her former admirer was utterly distasteful to her. She saw him now with different eyes. She was a different girl.

He made no reference to their last meeting, neither did she. He was content to tell her in a somewhat boasting vein of his exploits as a pugilist, of the money he had earned, of his opportunity of going to London.

"What's 'appened to you?" he asked at length. "Lord lumme if you don't look like a b—— funeral. I tell you what it is, my girl, you're goin' to have a drink at the pub with me."

He seized her arm jocosely, but Mary pulled it away.

"Don't you dar to touch me," she flamed pettishly. "I hates to be mauled and pulled."

He recoiled, at first puzzled as to whether it was not coquetry, and then his obvious discomfiture was such that Mary relented. After all he meant kindness. She consented to go to the public-house if he liked, and roused herself to be more agreeable to her companion. They went into the bar together, and he ordered beer for both, as well as for some other rough-looking slouchers who greeted them, and were evidently assuaging dryness caused by the revels of the night before. Two women who were unknown to Mary with their hawking-baskets were there, healthy strapping creatures who exchanged jokes with the men and seemed by their appearance to be partly of gypsy blood. Alf rallied them and was rallied back, and Mary found her-

self being greeted by them friendlily enough. The story of her escape had already reached them—news travels apace in Heavenly Bottom, and they congratulated her roughly on her flight.

Mary was unused to heavy drinking, yet like most gypsy girls, she drank beer when it came her way. Drinking is often a form of sociability and of good-fellowship, more than of personal desire, and Mary drank, first with Alf and then with the women, who would have thought her refusal strange. And the alcohol mounting to her unaccustomed brain, brought two distinct veins of thought into being. Behind all the subtle physical comfort that ran with the alcohol into her healthy young body, there was a fierce mental misery culminating in a don't-care-ishness, a pitilessly logical view of her own foolishness, her own misery, her own perversity.

She exchanged gossip with the women and parried Alf's compliments and jokes almost mechanically. She felt her cheeks flushed, she knew that she was laughing. And underneath it all her heart was breaking. She would have given half her youth to have been able to escape from these people and go into the silence of Verely or Ridley, the great woods, and sob her heart out at the roots of one of the friendly, impassive beeches, so grey, so dignified.

She refused to drink any more.

"Lord! You ain't likely to get motto with *that* drop," laughed one of the women, but Mary was determined, and Alf, seeing it, ceased to press her, and suggested going outside.

When the public-house doors had closed behind them the cooler air blew on her heated face. Her hair, curling slightly, fell over her forehead and into her eyes, and she pushed it back impatiently.

"Where 're you off to now, Mary?" asked Alf.

"Down to Julia's," she answered shortly.

"Don't clear off yet. There's lots of time. Her old man won't get back till near seven o'clock. You don't want to go down there amongst all them squalling brats. Come and 'ave a blow up there on the top of the 'ill. I'd like to stretch my legs."

"Who's a-stoppin' you?" said Mary.

"Don't be 'ard on me. Come along, too. It won't do you no 'arm. Besides," and his voice grew thicker, "I wants to talk to you. I ain't seen you since I bashed that fancy rye of yourn at Neacroft, and then you wouldn't give me a chanst to talk to you."

"Awright," she said indifferently, and they began to walk together up Constitution Hill, the great trams passing them noisily before turning to rush down into Parkestone. They left the main road and made their way to that plateau which used to be the favourite resting-place of Turner in the days when the valley beneath was innocent of red-brick villas and factory chimneys. In spite of the hideousness of the new Parkestone and its tentacle union with Poole, it was still a magnificent stretch at their feet, with Poole Harbour gleaming like silver as it ran inland and the Isle of Purbeck blue and golden beyond. Alf flung himself down on the worn grass beside a furze-bush, and Mary seated herself beside him.

"What's become of him?" Alf asked suddenly, fixing unseeing eyes on the shining valley.

"Become o' who?" said Mary.

"That bloke I licked."

"I dunno," said Mary.

"You ain't got nothink to do with him now?"

"No," she answered listlessly, biting a blade of grass she had plucked.

He was silent, regarding her face with somewhat bloodshot eyes.

"I don't wonder the swells runs after you," he remarked, after a while. "You've got handsome, that's what you've got. You're the handsomest girl as 've seen anywheres. Don't do that, I ain't goin' to bite you. Mary! do you hear what I says?"

"A lot of rubbish," said she, still speaking from a mental distance, her main thought scarcely on him.

"'Tisn't rubbish, it's Gawd's truth." He spoke hoarsely again. "I done nothin' else but think of your pretty face for weeks and weeks, Mary. I could 'ave any of the gals round 'ere if I wanted them, but I don't want none of 'em. They ain't worth lookin' at after you."

"Oh, shut up, Alf," said Mary.

"I ain't goin' to shut up," he said fiercely. "I want you, and I'm goin' to get you, too. I'm earnin' good money now, and I'm likely to earn a good bit more. I'm not goin' in for your purse-of-gold pug shows, I'm flyin' high. The chap what come from London told me there's no end to the money you can make fightin' now if yer gets yer name up. It's 'ard work, but 'e say I got the right stuff. What's wrong with you an' me gettin' married?"

"I don't want to get married," she said, her heart thumping irregularly.

"Well, I do," he said. "And I wants you. Do you hear, Mary? And I means to have you."

"You can't if I won't," said she.

"Don't be 'ard on me, Mary. Where'll you find another chap what's the chanst of makin' money like what I got?"

He caught hold of her arm and held it firmly. This time Mary did not shake him off. The beer had slack-

ened her nerves ; she felt indifference rather than resentment.

“ Was this the way out ? ” her unnaturally clear brain asked. Once married legally to Alf and her gypsy marriage with Adam would be superseded. It was the only way in which to sever herself from Adam completely. Otherwise, she could never trust herself. She might obey her heart-hunger in a mad impulse and seek him out and make his ruin, as Miss Price had put it, irrevocable. Her gypsy fatalism was strong within her. Was this the road that the patrin of Fate indicated ?

“ Mary ! Mary ! ”

His hot breath was on her neck, and she shrank involuntarily.

“ Don’t ! ”

“ Awnswer me ! ” he said urgently. “ What you got to say to it ? ”

“ I dunno,” she replied irresolutely.

“ I’ll treat you well, Mary. You shall have di’ments on your fingers and fine clothes to your back. I’ll spend the money on you when I gets it.”

She pushed him away forcibly.

“ If I was to say ‘ yes,’ how long ’ud it be afore we could get married ? ” she asked in a hard tone.

“ It ’ud take just over three weeks,” he answered, reflecting. “ There’s the bands to be put up. Oh, Mary——”

She cut him short.

“ Can’t it be done no quicker than that ? ”

“ Not unless I was to buy a licence, and that costs lots o’ money. And I’d have to get some sticks of furniture.”

“ I don’t want to live in no house,” said Mary.

“ Well, then, in a van. But that ’ll cost money, too.”

“ More’n what you got ? ”

"I could raise it," he answered.

"Haven't you got enough?"

"I could manage the van, with luck, but not a b—— licence."

He was puzzled at her. There was something about her desire for haste which was incomprehensible in the face of her seeming indifference. Then he remembered her position; that presumably she had fallen out with old Sam her father, and was facing a difficult independence. The gypsy people are faithful to family ties. To break with one's people, among these nomads is an act of the utmost seriousness. He was not a gypsy, yet he had mixed enough with travellers to know that. Degraded as was gypsy custom in Heavenly Bottom, it still held good in many things.

He drew closer, put his arm around her. Mary suffered it in a hell of passivity. It was as if part of her, the real living core of her, were dead. Alf kissed her, roughly, fervently, beerily. She endured it.

"You're goin' to take me, then?" he asked between his embraces, forcing her backwards, her face upturned to his.

"Yes," she answered wearily, drowsily.

"You're not sweet on any one else?" he urged, his little eyes blazing into her own.

"There isn't no one else," she replied, with dry lips.

He was holding her closely, but the beer she had taken mercifully stupefied her senses. She had none of the violent repulsion she would have felt had she been perfectly sober.

"I'll put the bands in at once," he said in his passion-thick voice. "I cawn't wait for you, d'you hear? Gawd! if you knowed how much I've bin thinkin' of you."

CHAPTER XXII

MISS PRICE had to face a bitterly cold and angry Lyddon early the morning after Mary had left the camp. The old lady was prepared both for him and his anger. He had come to her house the night before and had been refused admittance by her orders, she had felt too tired to do battle with him then. Now she deemed it wiser to see him.

"It was Mary James's own wish to go," she replied. "She came of her own free will when I told her that my friend needed a maid."

Lyddon's face was set in lines of steel. She could see that he suffered as any man suffers when baulked of happiness close at hand, but she hardened her heart against softer impulses. She read his disbelief in every word she had uttered in his icy demand for Mary's address.

"That I must refuse."

"And I must have it."

"She knows where you are, and if she wishes to let you know her whereabouts, she can write herself. Mary was at the school and knows how to write a letter."

"It may be intercepted."

"It will not. Mary wishes to break with you."

"I don't believe it."

"That is your egotism. Look at it from her point of view. This marriage isn't going to make her happy. She cried when she told me her doubts of it. She has tried to free herself before."

"She was perfectly happy until you came. Heaven knows what lie you told her."

"I told her none."

He turned abruptly and left her. She pitied him in the moment of success. She was right and he was wrong, but she had felt half ashamed of having lived up to her principles. She watched from the window his tall figure as it went out of the garden gate, his head slightly bent, his whole stiffness of gait somehow expressive of his fury and hurt. What was he after all, but a big, impulsive child, with instincts which she respected at the bottom of her soul? She never felt more tender over him than at this moment.

Lyddon went off with a big, loose stride into the hollies. He wanted to leave the accursed village behind him. A cart was tilted up against one of the bushes by the roadside, and two ragged nomad children were playing with the Jeffs' yellow, lurcher dog beside it. He avoided them, knowing that they would hail him in the remembrance of sweets usually to be found in his pocket. He made, almost mechanically, for the swampy hollow which had been his trysting-place with the gypsy. It was sweet now with blossoming bog-myrtle and tufts of wax heather, first of all the heaths and more beautiful than its successors, the bell and the ling. It was murmurous with flies and bees, the purple summer was at hand at last. He flung himself down in the young bracken miserably. One phrase of Miss Price's haunted and tormented him. "She cried when she told me her doubts of it." The words brought him a vivid picture of Mary—of Mary with tears in her eyes, their lids a little swollen, as she had looked at him that other day when she had cried here beside the swamp, the day

of the forest fire. Had he misunderstood her? Had he done wrong to refuse to take her at her own terms? The Puritan in him, the unfleshliness which he preserved in spite of all his passion for Mary, answered no. It was a personal shrinking that he had from doing that which would harm her, take advantage of her generosity, be less prodigal of the future than she. And yet, she had cried and run away.

He lay so silent that a rabbit passed within two feet of his prostrate body. A woodpecker in the blackened holm opposite uttered his mocking laughter. It was all Mary, it all spoke of Mary. The very smell of the crushed bracken, the faint, crisp tinkle of the heather in his ears, everything seemed part of her presence. No other woman could ever mean that to him. And again came the torturing question, had he misunderstood her? Had he puzzled her who was all simplicity? Had he wounded her?

He sat up impatiently in the sun-warmed heather. The very blueness and jocundity of this May day, the cheerful buzzing about him, the perfume of the earth seemed to mock him as the woodpecker had done, and yet he knew such a thought to be childish. Nature is too big to take into account the troubles of anything which lives and moves within her, because pain is part of her being, just as sunlight and frost. Far away from some slope of the moor beyond the holms, came the peaceful tink-tink of a cow-bell. And then he heard the noise of some one or something brushing past the hollies in the narrow path behind him. He turned abruptly, and saw a face peering at him directly above the gorse bush beside which he sat.

“Good-morning, my lucky gentleman!”

He knew the untidy black locks, the brown face that had remnants of beauty, the uncanny blue eyes as

belonging to Mrs. Cooper, of whom Allus spoke with hushed tones as being a witch.

“Good-morning,” he returned, none too graciously.

“Got a match on you, my lucky gentleman?”

He felt mechanically in his pocket and drew out a box. She caught it deftly, sat herself about three feet from him in the heather, and drew out her blackened clay. Then she felt in the pocket of her torn skirt.

“Lord save us, my darling, if I haven’t forgot my bit of ’baccy, and the shop two mile off, and me a poor woman that’s walked nine miles this morning, the Lord hear me, carrying my bit of a tan on my blessed back. The moskler down there at Tharneyhill met me a-comin’ up the bit of a hill, and haves a pleasant word with me, ‘You your own donkey, my dear?’ he says. ‘Yes,’ I says, and ‘that’s better nor bein’ some one else’s,’ I says, ‘if it wasn’t that what’s owned gets free food and drink.’ If you’ve a bit of ’baccy that you could spare for my old swaygler yer——” She paused suggestively, and Lyddon drew a packet of tobacco from his pocket and tossed it to her with scant civility.

She filled her pipe and leant over to lay the packet beside him again. Then she smoked in silence, looking across the boggy strip at the blackened holm beyond. So they sat for a while without speaking. Mrs. Cooper looked as contemplative as an Arab. Only those with gypsy blood among those of the brotherhood of the road have the gift of long and quiet silence. A tramp fidgets, while a gypsy can spend a whole morning without stirring a limb on a sunny day.

Then she lifted her pipe from her lips.

“You campin’ still, my boro rye?”

“Yes,” he replied, with a start, for he had almost

forgotten her presence. Her eyes were on him keenly.

“There was a young gal with you some while back. And there was a young gal, as pretty a one as ever I seen—a real Romany girl—what came to the old chovihaun about you. Loved you true she did, the tears in her pretty eyes for love of you, my lucky gennleman. Lucky’s every one what’s loved true. There’s many high and low, wealthy and poor, that comes to me because they calls me a witch, and the luckiest I have to give them is true love, high and low, wealthy and poor. Lords and ladies have come to me in my little tent under the rookers with gold in their pockets and di’ments on their hands, and not all the gold and di’ments they had was worth more than the little bit of true love they wanted all on ’em. I gave her a bit of a lil to hang round her neck and keep it safe and secret to be a spell between the boro rye and the tawni chai. Did you ever set eyes on that bit of paper, my darling?”

“Did you give her that?” he asked, amused in spite of himself.

“That I did, my dear, and it was that drewed me yer this morning. As I was standing beside my tent up there in the rookers, I seen the boro rye go by. ‘There’s my fine gennleman,’ I says; ‘that’s the lucky one to be loved true as never one was before. Then I seen trouble on you. There was trouble on your shoulders. It didn’t take the chovihaun to see that. Angry and troubled you was, and your face wasn’t the same face of the rye what I seen before. And me praying to the Lord every night for you and your sweetheart, believe me, darling, even when they put me into the klisind, which is the lock-up, because they seen me come out of a public where I’d gone to buy a bit of ’baccy and they said I was motto.

Motto! I likes a drop of tatti panni now and agen, but they that say they've a-seen me in drink lies. Every night I've prayed for that little kaulie raunie of yours, you can believe it or not as you like, my dear. Wheer is she? "

"The devil knows," said Lyddon harshly.

"Don't you go handling his name too free, my dear. The Lord knows, and maybe I know too."

"You know where she is? "

She put up her smoky hand dramatically as if to stop his impetuous question.

"I knows a good deal more'n most, my darling. They calls me the chovihaun, and that's another word for some one that's got their eyes and their yers open. You be open with me, and I'll be open with you. You be tatcho and I'll be tatcho. When did you last see the young gal? "

"Look here," said Lyddon, "I'll give you five pounds if you'll tell me where she is."

"Keep your money in your pocket till I tells you. There's time to pass before you'll see her. Unless you liked to give me a bar now to go on with," she added, quickly regretting. "Now you tell me when you last seen her and where."

He told her, and of the fact that Miss Price had induced Mary to go with her.

"There, the silly gal, and I warned her there was an adder in her path; solemn I told her of it. Adders come whar there's happiness as sure as they'll come out in the sun. And them as is unlucky gets pizened. Have you ever camped up in White's Bushes? "

"No."

"Nor don't you never, my gennleman. There's no good comes to travellers what sleeps there. And do you know why? It was when I was no older than

your little raunie, and as pretty as she was. There was a rye come after a gal what was camped there, a fine, beautiful gal she was, and dark as Em'ly up at Jeffs', though she was half a gauji. The rye, a real rye he was, was crazy about her. Then the adders come like they always come. His father and mother come and seen her father and mother, and there was bad words and bitter words, and the end of it was she went and drowned herself down there in the pond by the brick kiln, you knows, just below whar the Jeffs lives. Yes, that's true. And the pair on 'em not more than sixteen. Where are you goin' to atch now for a bit?"

"I don't know," he said gloomily. "Not near this cursed village, if I can help it. My tent's up at Forest Corner now."

"Well, if you was to bide near here it would be a good place to be in. You can kip away from Tharney-hill and that if you likes. Why don't you go up Wootton Pits? I'd know where you was, look, and it's a place where travellers stops now and agen. It's about two mile from yer, up against Wootton Enclosure. You go and get your tan and that and atch there for a bit. It's just up beyond the marl pits. I'll show you."

But Lyddon knew the spot, he and Mary had been there once, and she had pointed it out as a camping-place she and her father had used.

"Well, then, you goo there, and I'll come and find you some time afore long."

"Then you don't know where Mary is?" he said.

"What I knaws, I kips to myself till it's time to tell. What I don't knaw, I finds out. You do your part and I'll do mine, like I telled you. And when

I've done mine you gives me what you said, because givin' kips off trouble. And when you needs what I can give you, you shall have it, free and generous. I got a bit where no one knows, nor never shall know while there's breath in my body, please God, but you should have it if you needed it, the Lord knows." Her greedy, uncanny blue eyes watched his hand as it went once more into his pocket and drew out a shabby purse. The sovereign promised was transferred into her hand. She spat on it, and put it in her skirt. Then she spat once more over her shoulder into the bushes, got up, and after a voluble blessing, withdrew as stealthily as she had come. Lyddon rubbed his cheek. He could not have told now why he had handed the woman the sovereign, the larger part of which would certainly be spent in drink, for Mrs. Cooper's intemperance was a byword, unless, as Allus had said, she had the gift of charming money out of the pocket. Certainly, while he had talked to her, she had given him an odd confidence in her powers. Now he was convinced that she knew as little where Mary was as himself. And yet—he found himself setting forth for the long walk across the moor to Forest Corner with the fixed determination of getting to Wootton Pits. He might as well camp there as elsewhere, after all.

Charlotte Cooper's strange mind worked swiftly, if not by the same methods as those of most people. Miss Price was an enemy of hers, and therefore it was with a special pleasure that she could undertake anything that meant discomfiture for that lady. Years ago Miss Price had, at decent intervals, been available for an occasional pound of tea, for an old garment or two, or a piece of cold meat. Charlotte, like most

other forest nomads, knew more of the resident gentry within a radius of twenty miles than their names. She knew to a penny what she was likely to get out of them, and to a moment at what intervals it might be coaxed out of their pockets. At such a house there were credulous servants willing to pay good money for a written spell, at such a vicarage the parson was good for a loaf of bread, at another big house there were usually ladies to "dukker," or the men induced by a timely witticism to part with the price of a drink.

All this was knowledge of many years' standing with Charlotte, to be added to or modified as each year brought changes. But Miss Price had been alienated. She had come upon Charlotte once when the latter was violently drunk, and terrorising a peaceful villager by threats of bewitchment, and from that day forth Miss Price's door and her heart were closed to Charlotte. No one regretted it more than Miss Price, who found Charlotte amusing, but she reigned a queen in Thorneyhill, and Charlotte had offended too grievously to be readmitted to the royal graces.

But there were means of finding out Miss Price's affairs, and the first instrument to her hand was Joseph Jeff, who as gardener and odd-job man had free access to the house. Joe Jeff, taciturn and surly as he was, would answer a civil question if it was only out of dread of her. As she had expected, she found him digging in Miss Price's garden. The hedge which divided the vegetable garden from the high-road was low, and Charlotte, by raising herself on her toes, could just look over it. Joe's sturdy back was partly turned to her, his foot on the spade.

"Sst——!" said Charlotte cautiously. "Joe!"

Joe went on digging. He had caught sight of her

out of the corner of his eye through the hedge and feigned deafness.

"Yer, you unlucky old mush, ov akai a minute and speak to the chovihaun!" she said louder.

He gazed up with a look of innocence which cunningly concealed uneasiness. She had called herself a witch, and it accented his fear of her.

"Oh, 'tis you!" he replied sheepishly.

"Yes, it's mandy, you can lay all you've got, and you'd better shoon to me, or you'll be uneasy in your bed. Them pains a-shootin' and teasin' you and makin' you cry out, you remembers. Come close yer to the bor."

He approached the hedge unwillingly.

"It's about that niece of yourn, Joe Jeff. Do you know where she be?"

"No," said Joe. "Mary's along with her dad."

"She isn't, then. Wheer did Miss Price goo to yesterday?"

"I dunno."

"Oh yes, you does. Scratch your sherro, and be quick about it!"

"Now I knaws," said Joe. "She'd a-put up at the Crown in Ringwood because she borrored a buckle there, one of ours a-bruk."

"What time did she get back yer?"

"It might be eight o'clock," Joe answered tardily.

"Do any friends of hers live there?"

"I dunno."

"There's little you do know," said she contemptuously. "Kips your yokkers closed and yer yers stuffed like most of the other fools."

"You ain't a-goin' to put a spell on Mary," he said, with slow alarm.

"Awali, I be," she returned sarcastically. "Fine

spell I'll put on her and you too if you don't look out for yer kukri!"¹

Then she went off, well pleased with the obvious alarm she had planted in the man's soul. And her face was set towards Ringwood.

¹ Self.

CHAPTER XXIII

IF you were to ask a gypsy he would tell you that Wootton Pits is a good camping-ground. The spot where he pitches his tent is, however, past the pits, now disused and overgrown, on higher ground not far from the high-road and in the shelter of the enclosure. Further down, in the heathery bottom a fordable stream flows which makes its way through copses and undergrowths till it reaches the sea near Highcliffe; and with rising ground, wind shelter and running water a camp has the elements of comfort.

Lyddon returned to Forest Corner and saw the rat-catcher, to whom he gave the news shortly that he had been unable to find Mary. He also bought the donkey and cart from him at more than its worth, so that he might have means of transport. The rat-catcher gave as his opinion that what Mary wanted was a hidin'. All women wanted a hidin' sometimes; it kept 'em in their place. If he caught her she should know it, makin' fools of 'em all like this. But Lyddon suspected, with some disgust, that what the old man chiefly regretted was the loss of a son-in-law from whom he could extract money. He had liked Sam hitherto, but now he said good-bye to him with relief.

No other tent or van was pitched at Wootton Pits, and for the utter solitude Lyddon was grateful. He made coffee that night in the little tent to the hooting of owls, and actually saw one fly to a tree visible in the starlight a few yards from his camp. He liked the soundful silence of the forest night.

Perhaps the morning might bring him Mary. It was a groundless hope, but it was ineradicable since he had seen Mrs. Cooper. The early morning, silver with warm mist, found him unable to sleep. He went down to the stream, and stripped himself to wash in its shallow water safe of intrusion at such an hour. Only the water-wagtails and the early bees were abroad, except for a lark or so that had not yet forgotten the songs of spring and were high up in the blue air, though their throats did not thrill so ecstatically as in the first glorious days of courting. Then he wandered into the enclosure, misty and warm with the promise of a hot day. A couple of squirrels chased each other from branch to branch in the pines and firs, and the sweet resinous smell grew stronger and stronger as the sun grew more powerful. The great undertone of the forest became louder: the hum and buzz of insects, the chirping of the grasshoppers, the distant call of a cuckoo, the glad excitement and fulness of life which must find voice in the prodigal warmth of late spring and promise of the summer. He returned to his tent, glad with the optimism of the morning, scribbled a message to Mary in case she might come and find the tent empty, pinned it to the tent opening with a thorn, and after he had cooked and eaten his breakfast wandered restlessly forth again towards Holmesley Enclosure, over the moor to the long green stretch of Burley Lawn, and thence, following the stream which threads the Lawn by a roundabout route to Burley itself, where he purchased food and one or two dainties that he knew Mary would like. He got back to his tent at two o'clock to find all as he had left it. The afternoon did not bring Mrs. Cooper or Mary, nor the evening either. At nightfall he walked over to Thorneyhill

to see if the Jeffs had heard anything of their niece, but they had not, and their curiosity and half-expressed sympathy irritated him so intensely that he quitted them abruptly. The little imp Allus was abed, together with the other children, so that he only saw Em'ly, her mother and the silent Joe. For Em'ly the beautiful he had only aversion, he could not tell why.

As he walked over the cart-track across the moor in the dark that was scarcely more than twilight, with great dung-beetles booming across his path from time to time, he felt an insane belief that he should find Mary in his tent, perhaps asleep and tired out, as he had found her once before, her muddy boots stretched out, her figure slack with fatigue—— But no, she would be expecting him, the fire would be alight and the wood smoke rising from the tent, supper a-cooking in the pot. He almost fancied he smelt the sweet acridity of smoke on the night air as he got to the marl pits, but when he came within sight of his low tent against the dark blue of the night sky, it stood out stark and still. The donkey, hobbled in the gypsy way, was visible, too, against the sky-line, its ears bent sadly, its attitude drooping. The soft chr-rr-rr of a nightjar, the chirping of grasshoppers were the only sounds that met his ear. The stars were out in the scarcely darkened sky, bats flitted here and there like black velvet shadows noiselessly in search of insect food, but there was absence of human sound or movement or light. The tent was empty and dark.

And if Mary were never to come back, it must always be empty and dark at his return each night-fall, and even the eternal companionship of the Forest could not make up for her absence who was associated with its every mood. The very scent of wood smoke

was the scent of her clothes, of her brown, silver-ringed hands. All this out-of-door life that he loved so passionately was for ever associated with her.

And then the horror of loneliness that Nature inflicts sometimes on those that love her most descended upon him like a darkness. He felt himself human, of the race which had cut itself off from the eternal communion which makes herb and beast and bird sufficient unto themselves. The curse of civilisation which is the fear of isolation came upon him as if he had been in a desert island. He wanted Mary, and he wanted her physically at that moment of horror, more physically than he had ever wanted her before. He wanted to hold her, warm and sweet and shy, in his arms, to bury his face in her lap, to take her close to him, so close that horror would be for ever shut out. He wanted to feel her cheek against his, to hear her husky, pretty voice telling him that he filled her heart right up.

He lay on the brown blanket and bracken within the tent for a while like a big child afraid of the dark, and then, controlling himself, rose and fed the donkey and kindled a fire. The donkey was alive and warm to the touch, the fire had something human about it, and his mood of madness passed at last. He made himself some supper, and then flung himself down to sleep. And the tent was empty but for his big and restless body.

CHAPTER XXIV

AFTER a few hours of heavy sleep the night following her promise to Alf, Mary awoke to burning hours.

She could see the scarcely darkened sky through a slit at her tent-opening, and hoped for dawn long before it arrived, that she might escape from herself into the world of action. As soon as the birds began to chatter and the day to lighten, her restlessness drove her up and out. Heavenly Bottom was not astir yet, and although it was light she met scarcely a soul as she set off. She made her way up Constitution Hill, high above the mist-milky valley and shining harbour—the world beneath looked like an opal—and then walked down the further side, scarcely caring what direction she took.

She wondered, ceaselessly and throbbingly, if she had been mad the evening before. But her reason approved of what she had done. It was her instinct which sickened. Yes, she had chosen the only way to break the tie which now existed between her and Adam, and if her flesh shrank from the means, her spirit must go bravely on.

“There’s lots of gals have married men what they didn’t like to touch them,” she thought. “They gets on all right in the end. But oh, I wishes it wasn’t Alf—though he’s a good little chap——”

Again a kind of nausea seized her at the thought of his possession of her. She had lived close to the realities of life. She had seen women in the throes of childbirth, she had watched the youth of girls but

a little older than herself fade in a few years, she had witnessed scenes of brutality which robbed marriage of its glamour for her. And yet it was the inevitable part of every woman; and none who had loved their man ever looked back, or thought of looking back. Gypsy women, healthy to the core, endure the hardships their sex is heir to ungrudgingly and preserve their ability to smile and their keen enjoyment in life. A baby on one hip and a heavy hawking basket on the other, a man to work for and children to feed was their lot, and they conceived of no other. If it had been Adam, Mary too, with the mystery of woman's nature, would have rejoiced in the sacrifice of liberty she brought him and the prospect of bearing his children in pain and pride.

But her whole soul rebelled at the thought of the sacrifice to be made for a man who was not Adam. It sickened her while she steeled herself to it. She thought of her marriage in all its naked truth with a dreadful fascination. She had in her the dread of relinquishing maidenhood inherent in her wild-blooded race, the dread which had driven her cousin to hide away from the man she loved on her wedding night. It was primitive, it was instinctive, it was savage. That was why she had covenanted for an immediate marriage. She feared her own instinct.

She had reached the outskirts of Poole, and crossing a patch of derelict ground by a brick kiln for the sake of escaping the road, found herself in a little sandy valley covered with stunted pines which faced the desolate moor between Poole and Broadstone. Few ever cross this moor but gypsies, and the green lanes converging on it which carters used when times were otherwise are being discreetly dead-ended by estate agents who prefer rights of way to lapse. In time it

will be marked out into building lots, as the town spreads itself, and paths worn by centuries of wayfarers will disappear for ever.

It is as if the melancholy of dissolution were already upon it. Even on this May morning, with the early sun sending long dewy shadows from the stunted pines at its verge, it had a look of death, despite the bees buzzing over the heather and the larks singing perpetually in the sky overhead. It was a sad-looking country; whole stretches of the hillside were whitened by coarse yellowish grass or blackened by fires. Here and there solitary and meagre pines broke the monotony, or patches of yellow moss in watery bottoms still steaming with evaporating mist. But the silence and the scent of it brought comfort to Mary. She stretched herself on the pine-needles at the wood's edge face downwards, and felt the sun warm on her back. There was always that much good in life, anyhow: always paths to follow, and a sun to warm one, and a wind moving in the trees. No marriage could change her so that she could not feel the exhilaration of these. She told herself this in desperation as one clings to a straw of comfort.

It did not occur to her that she could free Lyddon of the gypsy marriage by any other means than that she had chosen. Past generations had held the gypsy marriage binding enough, and only gypsies who had got religion or had higher social pretensions than the rest married in church. Now, thanks to Church Army missionaries and other forces of civilisation, the Church marriage was considered more decent, more genteel, more binding. The law of the land means little to a race which spends life in evading it and respects old tribal custom, though tribal custom be all but obsolete. Lyddon had once spoken to Aunt Gerania of the

Missioner who made it his duty, armed with silver-gilt rings, to seek out the nomads who had not sought the blessing of Church or State on their union and persuade them into marriage. Aunt Gerania had spat, and then remarked—

“It pleases he, and does no harm to they.”

So that the broomstick marriage, unless superseded, was a genuine tie to Mary, and she wanted nothing to tie Adam to her but their happiest memories of each other. She remembered the warm February day when they had rested together on the brow of Castle Hill up in the dear old Forest after collecting wood, and had looked out over the valley and talked of the odd feeling that spring brings with it. And the night upon which instinct had brought her to him in Verely Wood, and they had gone back together across the moor, his hand tight on her arm; nothing could rob her of that, either. She remembered each moment of their companionship as a mortal remembers dealing with a god. He was not of her world or her people. Yet he had loved her and made her glorious though ashamed. She buried her face in the pine-needles. Now and here was her parting with him.

“I won’t never think of him again like this,” she half whispered to the aromatic, friendly earth; “s’up me Duvvel. Yer am I, goin’ to get married to my mush, and still thinkin’ of yer, Adam. Lord! how I wants yer——”

She lay perfectly still, until the sun on her back grew hotter, the shadows shorter. She sat up at length, and brushed off the ants which had crept inquisitively on to her clothing, and got up resolutely. When she got to the brick kiln she drew out a packet of Woodbines from her bodice, and a box of matches, and lit herself a cigarette, dashing away the tears

that brimmed over her eyes with a resolute and shabby sleeve.

“Mandy’s bishered opray the pani
With my Romany rakli
Opray along of mandy.
What a kushti bit of kel
Mandy will lel
Along of my Romany rakli”¹—

she hummed, with false gaiety. A sob rose in her throat, unbidden, stupidly.

“Don’t be a bori fool!” she apostrophised herself angrily, and repeated the end of the chorus doggedly—

“What a kushti bit of kel
Mandy’ll lel
Along of my Romany rakli.”

“Oo’s that singin’?” asked one workman, who had just arrived at the kiln, of another.

“Can’t you see? One of them gypsy lot down in Heavenly Bottom. There she goes, smokin’ like a man. I’d like to have the lot of ’em burnt out like emmots! A rough lot, they be!”

She went back towards the camp, found the world astir at last, and hastened lest she might miss the other flower-sellers when they set off for the nursery gardens. In this clear morning light she dreaded meeting Alf. Cheerfulness was abroad: there was the scrunching of cart-wheels along the road, men

¹ “I’m to be transported
With my Romany girl,
Transported over the water.
What a spree it will be
Along with my Romany girl.”

whistling as they went to work, cocks crowing, smoke arising from countless chimneys—all the glad noise of the world beginning its summer day.

But her fears were not realised. Alf Stace was still abed, and she found herself just in time for the start. Julia was sitting on the steps of her van suckling the baby; the pretty White girls, dark, laughing and in morning spirits, were munching bread-and-butter with her, their baskets beside them, before setting out to purchase their wares. Mary was handed a cup of long-brewed tea and a piece of bread-and-butter like the rest. This morning Julia's face was flushed with health and sleep and was cheerful, while the baby fed as if its mother's milk contented it. In her basket were some flowers saved over-night in water, fresh enough to pass muster for the day's market. Julia had found an old basket for Mary to use.

Such a chatter there was among the magpie lot of them! Leah Sanders had chingered with her man the night before, and he had taken a stick to her and koored her cruel. ("And he give her a swell fur chocta [cloak] at Easter the last time he koored her.") One girl declared she wouldn't mind getting beaten if her mush was to give her a handsome present to make up for it! Hadn't Mary heard Leah hollerin'?

Mary was glad that the women knew nothing yet of her promise to Alf. She was rallied about the time she had spent with him on the hill, however, but she managed to parry questions and chaff with ease.

Then the healthy, laughing throng shouldered their baskets and set off up the hill towards the tramway, Julia's baby settling itself to sleep in her shawl. The conductor greeted them jocosely, and was ready for

their chaff; he knew most of them by name and all of them by sight. Mary, too, felt lighter-hearted. The meeting with Alf that she had dreaded was put off again by some hours, and the reprieve was more than she had hoped.

CHAPTER XXV

ALF STACE walked slowly into Heavenly Bottom at seven o'clock, only to find that Mary had gone off with the flower-sellers. In the soberer hours of the morning the little pugilist's brain, unclouded by drink and clarified by his passion for Mary, had begun to work in a manner which had not tended to fill him with the triumph of the successful wooer. There had been something queer about Mary's behaviour the previous evening, which was not to be accounted for by her quarrel with her father alone. After her maddening indifference to him, her sudden acceptance of him and her eagerness for an early wedding was enough to set any man's jealous suspicion aflame. Doubts began to rankle in his mind. Was there a sinister and pressing reason for her desire to be married at once? he asked himself, with deepening gloom. It would not be the first time that a girl had snatched at one suitor to shield herself from the consequences of her love for another man. His face and forehead flushed, and his fists clenched at the evil suggestion. Then he wiped away the sweat of his thought from his brow, in the resolution to tell Mary outright of his suspicions, so that she might herself dispel them. And yet—what woman, and above all of gypsy blood, ever told the truth when it was vital to her to lie? Last night, she had said there was no other man. She might or might not have been speaking the truth.

He remembered Lyddon with suspicion, and the talk that he had gathered about him and Mary. He would let Mary know that he was not to be befooled. He had

no mind to father a brat that was not his own. Yet—what evidence had he? Only her strange haste to be married. She might be straight enough—and yet——

He loitered miserably about in the sunshine, unable to solve his own doubts and fears. Then he cursed himself for a fool. His only means of finding out would be to find some of the Thorneyhill people and question them as to Mary's recent doings and dealings. He knew that some of the Thorneyhill women came as far as Boscombe to sell their flowers, he knew the public-house where they usually stopped for a midday pint of beer; maybe if he went that way he might encounter one of them and hear the truth, as far as truth is ever to be got from a didakai, who can never give a straight answer to a straight question.

On the impulse of the moment he set off towards Bournemouth, along the valley which skirts Talbot Woods and ends in the Gardens after its ragged beginning in Heavenly Bottom. He had the instincts of the bully and rough, but he prided himself on cunning and knowledge of the world. It was a better plan to question the gypsy girls from Thorneyhill than to ask Mary, he thought with increasing self-satisfaction as he walked along, with a trace of swagger that came of his prize-fighting stock, his cap pushed back from his hair, his neck-tie fastened rakishly.

He came at last into the Square, where the prosperous heart of the watering-place beat. Pretty girls of the well-dressed class, young men with the fashionable stoop of the year, pleasant-faced parsons, well-to-do old ladies with their companions: all the world to whom middle-class comfort is a matter-of-course, crowded the pavements, or got in and out of the trams. Alf gazed at them with the vague hatred of his kind for "swells," and while pausing somewhat aimlessly

on the kerb he became aware of an altercation between a policeman and a woman whose earrings and empty basket proclaimed her a hawker. To judge by the amused expression of the few idlers who were looking on, the policeman was getting the worst of the argument. Alf, with the instinct of the loafer, went up to the little group, but it melted as he approached it; the woman settled her shabby hat, and the policeman, with an air of lofty detachment, returned to his post by the lamp-post. Finding herself facing Alf, the woman addressed him.

"Moving me on when I wasn't standing still, and askin' me for me licence when I 'adn't nothing in my basket to sell! What I puts in my basket or what I takes out of it's nothin' to 'im. I was on my way, I telled him, to buy a pretty little spring chicken and a nice bottle of stout to take back with me, and invited him to come to supper with me to-night, to have a slice off the breast of the dear little bird; but, Lord love us, the mush was too proud to haccept of the poor gypsy-woman's invitation!"

Alf, the only being who still stood to listen to her peroration, stared at her lean and sunburnt face with contemptuous familiarity.

"Why, it's old Mother Cooper!"

She looked at him keenly.

"Cooper's my name, and Mrs. before it, for those who speak civil and genteel, young man. Ah, I knows you! Dordi, dordi! You're the mush what got fightin' with the gaujo rye up at Neacroft races. I yeerd all about it from they Jeff gals."

"Wish I'd done for him," replied the young man sulkily.

She paused a moment beside him, her light-blue eyes full of sudden thought and cunning.

"Come into the gardens a minute," she said confidentially. "Now I thinks of it, I wanted to meet you." She laid a brown hand on his arm. "I can't stand talkin' yer, or the raffally old moskler 'll lel me."

"What you want?" said he rudely.

"Come on, my dear, I've something pertickler to say to you."

He began to follow her reluctantly, but under the spell of her mysterious voice and manner.

"I can see in your mind, back of them eyes of yours, and what I sees is trouble," she went on, keeping her magnetic gaze fixed on his lowering face. "You've been vexed in your mind about some one I could tell you something of if I had the wish to, my dear."

"I ain't goin' to give you nothin' for your rubbish," said he suspiciously, hanging back.

She forced him forward, and against his own will he sat down beside her on one of the municipal seats.

"Keep your money for them as asks for it," she said pleasantly.

Then she cast a furtive glance around the garden. No one was visible, except an unemotional nurse-maid in uniform on the next seat, an old gentleman pursuing his leisurely way along the path, and some children playing noisily in the grass.

"Rubbish, you calls it! Well, I'm not goin' to give you any witchcraft now, though there's things I could tell you as would astonish you, my dear, as it astonishes the gentlefolks as asks me to their houses on purpose to hear what I got to say. 'Ask Charlotte,' they says, and puts their hands into their pockets and draws out the money. Ladies and lords have come to me, no less. But to yourself I say 'No, that's not good enough for him, truth and fact is what he wants.' You treat me tatcho, and I'll treat you tatcho."

"Yer, what d'you want to tell me?" he asked truculently.

She dropped her mincing manner, and spoke in a low voice.

"You don't like that blessed gaujo we was speakin' of," she said. "He was after the gal you fancied for yerself. You needn't look at me like that, my dear, they Jeff gals telled me all about it, and what happened at Neacroft the day you and him fought up there."

"What's that to you?" he growled. "I knocked his dirty 'ead for him, and 'ud do it again if I was to come acrost him."

"It's nothin' to me," she replied. "Only, though you ain't a traveller, you bin about with travellers and knows our ways. That's why I'm takin' the trouble to be sittin' yer with you, and a-tellin' you somethin' you'll like to hear."

"You can tell me somethin' I wants to 'ear if you likes," said Alf brutally. "What do they say about 'im and Mary James up at Thorneyhill?"

"Ain't you lived long enough yet to know that what they says is mostly lies?" she answered scornfully. "What they *says* ain't worth much, I goes by what I knows."

"What do you know?" he asked, moistening his heavy lips with his tongue to ease their dryness.

"That——" she paused, and then stated the truth in a form complimentary to her hearer, "that he wanted to marry her, and she run off and give him the slip."

"He wanted to marry her?" he repeated incredulously.

"Yes, my dear, I give you God's oath upon it. Money and di'ments he had to give her, but off she went, showed him the heel of her boots, and never

so much as a thank you." Mrs. Cooper's dramatic gesture completed her picture.

He drank in the flattery, and the balm stole into his soul.

"So that was why she come off yer," he exclaimed slowly.

"You seen her, then?" asked Charlotte. Her pulse quickened, but she was careful not to betray her eagerness.

"She's up along with Julia White at Heavenly Bottom."

Charlotte concealed her jubilation. Here was luck such as she had not hoped for, though she had a strong belief in her own lucky instincts. Her only object in talking to Alf, had been to set him watching for Mary in Bournemouth; but by a piece of unexampled good fortune, she had hit instead upon the very piece of information she was seeking for. She had a superstitious belief in herself, and for the moment she verily believed that her own occult powers had led her to address Alf, and so learn what she had wished. The money Lyddon had promised her seemed to materialise before her eyes. For Alf and his wishes she cared not a jot.

She questioned him adroitly, and drew out of him the story of Mary's flight from servitude, which tickled her immensely. It delighted her to think of the dismay of Miss Price when she should hear of it. Her victim, drawn on by sympathy and flattery, went on to tell her the more serious news that he was going to put the banns up for Mary and himself.

She congratulated him warmly, and gave him the impression that she thought Mary a lucky girl. It ended in a drink at a public-house and in mutual satisfaction. Mrs. Cooper parted from him with a volu-

bility increased by the glow induced by spirits and water, but she was careful not to exceed the bounds of sobriety, for she needed all her senses if she were to earn the five pounds that had been promised to her. Her next move must be to see Mary, and to interview her at all costs before she met Alf again. She shouldered her basket and made her way up the sunny street full of indecision, and trusting in her strange brain to one of those inspired impulses which so often stood her in good stead in her haphazard life of villainy.

She had long ago ceased to wonder at the strange vagaries of human nature, or she would have found food for astonishment in Mary's throwing over Lyddon for Alf. Mary loved Lyddon—and ran from him; Lyddon was the better match—yet she had promised to marry Alf. There seemed no possible reason for such behaviour, but Mrs. Cooper subsisted on her wits and her knowledge of the kinks and weaknesses of which mortal man is composed, and she knew that reason constitutes a negligible factor in a love-affair like Mary's. As for Alf, she dismissed him contemptuously enough as a fool, and an uncivil fool at that. Mrs. Cooper was as great a stickler for manners as the veriest duchess, and she never forgot or forgave an incivility, just as she never forgot those who treated her courteously. Lyddon, apart from his sovereigns, would have been in her favour for that alone. Though, with her, gratitude might be said to take the literal form of a lively sense of favours to come, it was based on genuine warmth of feeling. This old vagabond, whose hand was against even her own kind, had an intense and bitter pride which kept her self-respecting and dignified. Charlotte Cooper had a wholesome contempt for the majority of mankind, and would have agreed with Carlyle that Great Britain was mainly

populated with fools. If their folly was profitable to her, and enabled her to live in the manner in which she had elected to live, so much the better.

She debated a little within herself as to whether she should seek Mary out on her rounds at Christchurch. But it was problematic as to whether she would find her, and she had already walked many miles. She decided to loiter about the gardens and sea-front till the afternoon, and then go to Heavenly Bottom. There was no hurry, her granddaughter would guard the little tent in the hollies until she returned to it. She disliked the town heartily, and never came into it unless she were forced. There were better ways of living than hawking flowers and pegs about the streets: earning five pounds by your wits, for example!

CHAPTER XXVI

THE third morning since Mary's disappearance dawned to the accompaniment of a fine rain and a cold wind. May had played at June long enough; now she reverted to April. During the night a sea-mist had crept up from the coast and spread inland, and in the morning the mist turned into a drizzle of rain. Somehow Lyddon did not feel his nerves at so tense a pitch as he had done the day before. The grey light, the rain soft as a caress, the silver silence which replaced the hum and buzz of the golden yesterday, was more in accord with his mood. The donkey stood under the shelter of the enclosure, its hide shaggy and wet, its ears drooping, the pines and firs and spruces of the enclosure stood motionless in the grey mist of rain, the colour of the moor beyond the marl pits had disappeared. There was no blue distance, only the soft horizon of stooping clouds, breast to breast with the heather.

Lyddon had grown to love the rain since he had lived the forest life, above all when it was in this gentle humour. Indeed, rain is more depressing to the house-dweller than to the tent-dweller. Provided that heavy rainfalls do not flood him out—and a gypsy chooses his ground too cleverly for that to happen often—there is little hardship in the rain. To wet clothes and wet feet he is inured, rheumatism does not threaten his healthy body, colds are unknown to him.

So after Lyddon had cut enough furze tops and chopped them with his spade for the donkey, he stayed within his tent, watching the heavy smoke curl up from

the damp wood in his fire-tray and that of his own pipe, possessed by a quiescence of spirit born of the grey enchantment of the rain.

But his heart leapt suddenly when he saw Allus peering in at the opening of his tent. He had left a request with the Jeffs to bring him word if they heard anything of Mary. Yet Allus, her untidy hair plastered close to her strange little face by the damp, had no appearance of being more than a casual visitor.

"Hullo," said she succinctly.

"Hullo," he answered. "Come in."

She did so, pushed a damp strand of hair out of her eyes, and settled herself on the sugar-box.

"Well?" said he.

"Well——" echoed Allus.

He waited for her to proceed. She exhumed a dirty bag of acid-drops from a pocket in her skirt, untwisted its mouth, and held it out to Lyddon in silence. He refused the gift with thanks.

"Did your mother send you?" he asked.

"No," replied Allus. "I comed by myself, because I wanted to see yer."

His flicker of hope was extinguished. There was a brief silence, during which Allus could be heard sucking an acid-drop meditatively.

"Do you know who give me them sweets?" she said hoarsely and dramatically.

"No."

"Mary did."

"*Mary?*"

She nodded. "Yes. An' she give me somethin' for you, and said give you her love." With aggravating deliberation the child put her hand again into her skirt and drew out a small packet, sticky from contact with the sweets.

He opened it quickly, and saw the two rings he had given Mary. He stared at them a moment without speaking, then thrust them into his pocket and gripped Allus's arm.

"Where did you see her?"

"Leggo," said Allus, wriggling, "you're squeezin' my arm! I seen her yesterday. Mother and Em'ly got a lift in Abram Pidgeley's cart to Christchurch, and he says to me, 'Come along too, Allus,' he says, so I ridded up beyind, and we went into Christchurch."

"Go on," said he impatiently, as Allus paused.

"I am a-goin' on. Em'ly went on into Southbourne, and mother took me along with her. She was callin' at one of them 'ouses up against the railway bridge—you knows—when I seen Mary, with a basket of flowers on her arm, comin' along the street."

"With a basket of flowers on her arm!" he repeated incredulously. "Why, she's in service."

"No, she ain't, then. She's hawkin'."

"How do you know?"

"She telled me. She said, 'Come round the carner yer, quick, Allus, and don't tell yer mam ye've seen me. Come along sharp,' she says; 'I've somethin' to give you.'"

She paused again purposely, enjoying her listener's impatience.

"Oh, get on with it, you little devil!"

"She telled me she'd runned off from the place where she was. And she said she was livin' up ag'in Bournes-mouth now, and that she was goin' to get married. She said, give you her love, and she did them fawnies up in a piece of paper and tied them, and said put them in my putsy, and she give me threepence. That's what I got them acid-drops with."

He stared at her a moment in silence, and Allus was

somewhat disappointed with the result of her mission.

"Is that all she said?" he asked at length.

"She made me promise on my dad's hand I wouldn't say nothin' to no one but you as I'd a-seen her."

His pipe had gone out. He tapped the ashes into the tray, and slowly refilled it.

"How was she looking?"

"Same's she always looks," said Allus stolidly. "She hadn't no beads on nor earrings, though. P'raps she've pawned 'em. She began to cry when she done up them rings, and then she laughed too."

"Whom is she going to marry?" said he, examining his unlit pipe.

"She didn't say nobody. I shouldn't be surprised if 'twas Alf Stace. He's always bin at her to marry him, look, an' he lives somewheres up against Bournemouth."

"Where?"

"I dunno."

"Can't you find out?"

"I'll try," she said doubtfully.

"Will you see Mary again?"

"I don't go in to Christchurch most days, and Mary'll keep clear of mother if she don't want her to know wheer she is."

He sat silent.

"I thinks she koms you best," said Allus dispassionately.

"What makes you think that?" he said bitterly, almost forgetting that he was talking to a child. "She probably prefers Stace, if she is marrying him."

"She don't think nothin' of Alf. If he tried to kiss her, she delled him proper."

"But she's marrying him."

"She's a fool," said Allus, plainly stating a fact. "Look yer, Adam, you got a bit of bread or something?"

He opened his box of stores, and cut her a slice of cake. He had bought it with other dainties yesterday in Burley, so as to be prepared for Mary's return.

"I likes all this yer lemon-peel," said Allus appreciatively.

"Is she selling flowers every day in Christchurch?" he asked.

"I dunno," said Allus. "She've her reg'lar customers there."

"Do you know who they are?"

She shook her head, her mouth full of cake.

Yet the idea of hunting her down in Christchurch was repellent to him. The figure of her lover had come between them. Was this to be the end of his little tragi-comedy in the Forest?

"Never you keer, Adam," said Allus, her great black eyes peering over the cake from beneath her rain-wet elf-locks. "Theer's other gals about, look, Adam. Why can't I come along and cook and that for you? I'd do it for nothin', and you needn't marry me, because I'm not growed up. I can cook all right; stoo anything in the old kavvi, I can."

"You'd eat me out of the tent," he said, rousing himself to chaff her.

"No, I wouldn't, then. And I'd get all your sticks for you, and wash yer things, and chop the fuzz-tops for the old myla, and see the pigs didn't come in after yer things nor nobody take nothin'. I could do all that like what Mary could."

"And what would your mother say?"

"She'd not keer. There's too many of us chavis as it is."

He looked at the little wild creature with a look of sudden affection.

"You're a little brick, Allus."

"I kin read and write, too."

"And jump over a stick," he added teasingly.

"Now you're savvin' at me, Adam," she said, offended. "Sst!" She put up a finger warningly and listened, intent as a young doe with pricked ears.

"What is it?"

"Some one's a-coming," she said. "A gaujo's a-wellin'."

"How do you know it's a gaujo?"

"Because they walks different," said Allus. She got up, went to the opening of the tent, thrust her head out, and then turned back, a grimy, sunburnt finger laid against her lips.

"It's a raunie," she whispered hoarsely.

"What sort of a lady?"

"Can't see her face; she've got a breller. She ain't very big. Yes, my lady!" The latter part of her remarks was aloud in reply to an indistinct voice outside.

"I'm not here," said Lyddon to the child.

"You should a-spoke before. I just said you was. Well, I'll be jallin'."

"Come and see me this evening," said Lyddon hurriedly.

"Awright," said Allus indifferently, and, shaking and stretching her lean little body as a dog shakes off wet or cramp, she left him.

Lyddon pushed aside the flap and came out. He had guessed his visitor to be Eleanor.

"How did you come?" he said, with an attempt to be gracious.

"I asked one of the Jeffs. Miss Price said they would be likely to know. One of the sons brought

me as far as the claypits, and then I saw the tent and came on by myself. May I come in?"

"Of course."

She seated herself on the soap-box that Allus had vacated, her head brushing the low roof.

"I had to come and tell you about Mary," she said, coming to her point directly.

He waited.

"Miss Price wrote and told me that she had got her a situation, and that you did not know where she was."

"Well?" he said, drawing his big knees upward with a movement that was at once defiant and awkward.

"I thought it a very wrong thing to do," said Eleanor simply. "So I came over this morning in the motor—getting horribly wet, too!—and went to see her. She's no right to keep Mary's address from you. So I got it. You see, Dick, she is a regular old Tory, and she is all against mixed marriages. She thought she was doing you both a service against your wills. Here is the address—I've written it down."

She held out one of her own cards, upon the back of which something was scribbled.

He was uncomfortably moved by gratitude. "I say, Eleanor," he began, "you are——"

"No, I am not," she said. "I felt partly responsible."

"Responsible?"

"Yes," said Eleanor, with a quiver going over her pretty, sensitive face, the lines beneath her eyes accentuated. She plunged hurriedly into a partly truthful explanation. "You see, Dick, she knew about the letters. She knew the truth of it, of course—I told her; but I suppose she imagined we were going to knuckle

under to people's opinion and marry each other. It didn't seem unlikely to outsiders, I suppose."

"And how about Rochester?" he burst out hotly, and then stopped, ashamed of himself for having stated the case baldly.

"The world at large doesn't know about Guy. They only know the version which Marjorie whispered everywhere, and got sympathy for."

He made an angry movement.

"It would have been better if the damned letters had been threshed out in court, after all."

"Yes," she said ironically. "To have exonerated you—— It was my reputation that was at stake."

"And that suffered in spite of all," he replied bitterly, "thanks to your and Marjorie's friends."

"We aren't here to discuss my affairs or poor Marjorie's," she said. "It's about Mary."

He was aware of the subtle reproach. Eleanor had a way of putting him into her debt, of making him feel as if he owed her—what? It was a question which he always put from him.

"Your information about Mary comes too late," he said. "Mary left the woman she went to. Didn't Miss Price tell you that? She was perfectly safe in giving the address, as Mary isn't there."

"How do you know?" asked Eleanor. "Is she—here?"

"I don't know where she is. She was seen in Christchurch, hawking, by a gypsy girl who brought me a message. She is going to be married."

"Mary—married?" she echoed blankly. "To whom?"

"I don't know—for certain."

"A man—of her own class?" asked Eleanor deliberately.

"A man—if it is he—immeasurably inferior to her."

Eleanor was silent a moment, and then put out her ungloved hand and touched his sleeve in an impulsive way that made a claim on their long familiarity.

"Dear old Dick! I'm so sorry!"

He was resentful of sympathy, but Eleanor's grey-green eyes, misted over with tears, and her voice, full of emotion, quenched his surliness.

"Perhaps," said Eleanor, after a moment, "she will be happier so—in the long run."

"I don't see how she could possibly be happier with a brute who will very probably beat her when he is drunk."

"I don't know," said Eleanor slowly. "You know, Dick, there are plenty of women who respect a man more for beating them."

"Would you?" he said, in quick indignation.

"There are other ways of hurting besides beating," she answered. "Yes, I could stand a good deal of hurt from the man I love." ("You—you hurt me all the time!" her thought cried out to him, but his eyes were stonily unseeing of what was in hers.)

"I wonder!" he said enigmatically.

"Don't you believe it?" she said, with a smile.

"I know so little of the real you."

"After all these years of friendship?"

"There's all the gulf that always lies between a man and a woman to bridge over," he replied. "I never understood your affair with Rochester."

She was silent.

Then she said—

"I told you there was nothing genuine in that, either on his part or mine."

"What reason had you for pretence? If Rochester

hadn't been a trifle by profession, it would have been——”

“Dick, you've told me all that before,” she burst out impatiently. “I'll tell you something I've never told you till now, and you can pity me for a fool ever afterwards. I began that with the idea of making another man jealous—and failed ignominiously. Crude and mean, wasn't it?”

“What man?”

“You,” she answered recklessly.

He drew a deep and unhappy breath.

“Me? Why on earth should I be jealous?”

“If you'd cared for me, it would have been inevitable, wouldn't it?”

“I've always been fond of you.”

“Evasively. You've turned and twisted like a fox. You are afraid of me, of liking me, of having anything to do with me. Your friendship has been a sham.”

“What rubbish!”

“Can you deny it? It has put me in the unenviable position of a woman hunting down a quarry.”

“You are talking hysterically.”

“Naturally. It does make a woman hysterical—— Dick, Dick, forgive me. I am crazy to-day. But I am tired of pretending I don't want you when I do. Mary can throw you over. I tried hard, and could not. You used to be fond of me, years ago. And now I shall be making my eyes red. The truth is that I have nothing left but you, and I'm frightened of losing you. I should lose you if you married. I shall lose you now for talking like this, unless you can forget it—and you can't.”

He looked at her helplessly. At last the game of pretence was over. At the back of his mind had

always been the instinct which had taught him to fear Eleanor, and he had refused to face it. But he was facing it now. And it was he who felt the culprit.

"Don't cry, for goodness' sake don't cry!" he repeated gently, chafing the hand which had always seemed to him such a drawing-room thing, so white and feminine, and light, but curiously lacking in vitality. Was she, after all, the solution, the waking out of a dream, the return into captivity?

She drew her hand away, and controlled herself to smile at him. Little and appealing she had always been, and now he felt towards her as he felt towards a delicate, unhappy child.

"I must go. I shall never come to see you again. I shall never bother you again."

"No, no," he protested. "I can't leave you like this."

"Let me go," she said. "You'll breathe a great sigh of relief when I've gone."

He took her hand again, irresolutely.

"Eleanor, don't talk like that."

"Can you deny it?" she asked, with an hysterical laugh.

"Yes, I do deny it. We've been friends so long."

"Do you mean we can go on being—friends—still?"

He deliberately drowned the inner voices which clamoured "Fool!" at him. The wish to atone, the wish to somehow reconstruct things on the old comfortable basis was paramount within him.

"If you will still have me as your friend," he said.

And Eleanor, letting her hand remain within his, knew that he was playing ostrich, and that they would never be the same as before. Sooner or later, later

or sooner, their pretence of friendship would die of inanition. And then——

Nothing stood between them now.

“Will you come and see me?” she asked quickly.

“How long will you stay in Bournemouth?”

“Another month. You have my address.”

“I will come.”

CHAPTER XXVII

TEA-TIME was the hour at which most of the flower-sellers returned, and Mrs. Cooper, on the watch for them, smoked her clay pipe and squatted down on a patch of grass not far from the van and hut which together constituted Julia White's home in Heavenly Bottom. Meantime she chatted to one or two of the men who were idling about, pipe in mouth, waiting for their womenfolk to return and get tea, of the prospects of a long strawberry season. Even in Heavenly Bottom, Mrs. Cooper had a reputation as a conversationalist and a wit. Her darker claims to magic art were known too, but were more lightly thought of by these town gypsies than the cottage people up in the Forest. If she made a bit by "dukkerin" now and again, it was no more than the immemorial custom of women of gypsy blood, and only one out of many ways of coaxing money out of the pockets of those fools enough to believe what they were told. Most of the men bore gypsy names and were of "half-and-half" blood. Like Mrs. Cooper, they travelled up for the annual strawberry and hop seasons to North Hampshire, and in a few days they would be hitching their horses into their carts and vans, or getting cheap tickets if they had neither, for the migration. The summer's work, in which man, wife and children joined, provided them with the winter's necessities. There were some men who only worked in summer. Others, more industrious, did a little horse-dealing, chair-mending, or knife-grinding; some were in the rag-and-bone trade, a few mended

pots and pans, and so supplemented the summer's earnings. But the women could always hawk flowers or pegs and so contribute to the daily bread. Occasional fortune-telling brought in a shilling or two, and old clothes were usually to be begged from customers or charitable people. What could not be worn fetched good money up at the second-hand clothes shop in the main road above.

Presently the returning womenfolk appeared, hailed their menfolk with a shout and collected their grubby and straying offspring and disappeared one by one into their vans or shelters. Mrs. Cooper saw Julia, walking heavily with fatigue, an almost empty basket on one arm and her baby on the other, but she was alone.

"Mary'll be comin' soon," she told Charlotte, and invited her to share their tea.

Charlotte accepted, and smoked her pipe silently while the tired mother made the tea, and called to her heavy-browed young husband that the meal was ready. The children, a slice of bread and pork-dripping in one hand, watched with fascination while the old gypsy constructed a cat's cradle on her skinny hands with the piece of string that had lain at the bottom of their mother's basket. They had been left to their own devices all day, a neighbour's child, Emmy Stanley, having received a penny to keep an eye on the youngest to see he didn't choke himself. The baby woke to feed from its mother's breast, and soon lay in its shawl on a box in the hut kicking its legs which had found freedom at last, the dummy teat, suspended to its neck by a string, trailing on the floor unheeded.

But Mary did not come. Six o'clock, seven o'clock, and still no Mary.

Charlotte rose at last to go. She had to get back to Christchurch and then walk over the Forest to Thorneyhill, and she had told her grandchild Elsie that she would be back before night. Elsie would think she was in the lock-up again if she didn't get back. So she left a message with Julia for Mary that she would be on Christchurch Bridge the next day at ten with news that was very pertickler; then she went off to get the tram back to Christchurch Priory.

She had not wasted her day at all events. She knew Mary's whereabouts and her five pounds was, therefore, virtually earned. She had but to tell Lyddon where to find Mary, and that she would do this very evening before she slept.

At Christchurch she bought a piece of meat for supper, and then started on the tramp home. The road followed the river at first, and the sweet lush smell of the rushes and water-meadows, fragrant after the day, reached her. The honeysuckle was beginning to flower in the hedgerows, and the first dog-roses; the meadow-sweet was unfurling its creamy croziers among the rushes, and the flags were yellow in the ditch. Dust powdered the wayside, and the evening air was heavy. It was close on eight o'clock: the long twilight had begun. The birds were flying low. Charlotte sniffed the air. "That's no river damp," she said to herself. "Kekker. It's a-blowin' off the sea. I lay we gets some wet to-morrow unless the wind changes."

She walked with a steady slouch up the road. At the Carpenter's Arms, half-way home, she could get a bottle of stout to wash down her evening meal—she would allow herself no more until she had seen Lyddon, and the next day—well, it didn't matter how

drunk she was. Three of the sovereigns would join the rest of her secret hoard, with the rest she could make merry.

But Charlotte's occasional debauches had no effect on her seasoned body. She was not tired after her day. She could outwalk the younger generation. In the days of her childbearing she was walking her twelve miles a day a week after her confinement, the new baby in her arms.

The sky had clouded over, the twilight deepened, when she came out of the public-house. She began to walk up the long Bransgore hill; and the smell of the forest and the turf-smoke from the cottage chimneys told her she was nearing home. A villager at a gate saw her approaching, and went within doors, while Mrs. Cooper chuckled to herself. In Thorney-hill there were those who were chary of encountering the witch when dusk had fallen. Then she turned off towards the holms past the schools, and another half-mile brought her to her tent.

Elsie, her freckled grandchild, was waiting her, and showed her untidy fair head above the ragged tent. She was hugging a black kitten; the tame magpie that always followed them on their wanderings had hopped on the ridge-pole and sat awaiting his supper.

"Got the kekkavi on the yog?" (Is the pot on the fire?) her grandmother said to her, and the child knew from her tone that the old woman was neither drunk nor ill-tempered, and that this evening she had no blows to evade. In spite of all, Elsie loved her grandmam, and was her slave. The old woman could hold her fascinated with tales and the ballads which she knew and taught Elsie when she was in a cheerful mood.

"There's country songs, and old fashi'ned songs," her granny would say, "and the old fashi'ned songs is the best." The child loved most one about a knight and his lady who died a tragic death and were buried side by side. From each tomb a brier rose grew, and leaning towards the other formed what the old woman called a "true lovyers' knot." Charlotte liked to talk Romany to the child, too, it was useful when she wanted to give Elsie directions incomprehensible to the "boro yooi mush," the keepers, or the gaujos that came to have their fortunes told.

The meat went into the pot with some vegetables produced from under a corner of a blanket by the child, and an appetising odour arose.

"I yeerd some one in the bushes, jus' now," remarked the child, "creepin' about like as if they didn't want to be seen."

"Why didn't you dikk out then, you little dinn?"

"I hollered."

"'Twas one of they Lanes; they're camped near-by. They'd best let me catch 'em sneakin' around."

"No, 'twasn't them," said Elsie, who played with the two Lane girls of her own age. "Hush, there 'tis agen!"

Mrs. Cooper got up from the heap of bracken on which she sat, and going outside the tent listened for a moment. An owl was calling "Hoo-hoo," there was the distant goat-like call of the snipe, and the drowsy sound of the nightjar. But her keen old ears detected a movement that was human, as Elsie's had done. She went noiselessly around the thick clump of hollies that sheltered the tent on three sides, and saw a young woman seated beneath a gorse bush.

"Who is it?" she asked harshly.

Her visitor jumped up.

"It's me, it's Mary James," she exclaimed in a breathless voice. "I didn't want Elsie nor nobody to see me. I wants to ask you something."

"You've come all the ways from Bournesmouth!" said Mrs. Cooper. "Dordi, dordi! Didn't you get the lav I left with Julia for you?"

"I an't seen Julia since this mornin'," said Mary. "I met Alf in Bournesmouth as I was goin' back, and he told me he seen you and then—— I took it into my yed to come up yer and see you to-night."

"Ov in, and besh alay," said Mrs. Cooper, with no show of surprise. "I knowed you would come, and I've a nice bit of meat a-broilin', enough for us all and Tom thar, and to spare. You needn't mind Elsie, my darling, Lord love us, she'd bite her little tongue off rather than spik of anything her gran told her to kip to her kukri; and yer aunt and they's all in havin' their bit of supper most likely. Nobody's goin' to come yer this time of evenin'. Where are you a-goin' to atch to-night?"

"I'm a-goin' to walk back to Christchurch. There's a tram what goes at eleven, and if I walks quick, I can catch it if I starts ha'f an hour from now."

"You're goin' to lel a bit of hawben first, my gal, and then I'll send Elsie off somewheres if you wants to spik with me. Is it the stars you want to know? Thar, Elsie found an effut down there by the bog to-day and bro't it back, and that means it's a good night for such things. Ker sig, and ov in the tan. You ain't afraid to eat with the chovihaun, are you?"

"No," said Mary dully.

"That's right. The wind's blowin' up damp, and you shiverin' already, I thought p'raps you was atrash of mandy (afraid of me)."

There was a sudden flapping of wings, and the magpie, impatient for its delayed supper, settled unsteadily on Mrs. Cooper's shoulder. Mary uttered a little cry.

"It's on'y old Tom, you knows old Tom, the varmint. Follers us about he do."

The magpie flew off again and preceded them. The next moment Mary was seated within the grimy little oval of the tent; while Elsie, guarding the pot, kept her smiling freckled face turned in the direction of the visitor.

"You tell any one Mary James come yer, and I'll mor you!" her granny threatened. Elsie made no answer. The kitten crawled unsteadily towards Mary, the magpie hopped at the entrance.

"Rain's about," said Mrs. Cooper. "But they won't begin pickin' strawberries for another two wiks."

"First of June, to-morrow," Mary said, remembering.

"That's right, my dear," Mrs. Cooper rejoined. "Elsie and me goes off up country on Monday, God willin'. You goin' up for the pickin'?"

"I dunno," was Mary's listless reply.

"You're gettin' married instead?" suggested the old woman, maliciously, pushing her untidy black hair out of her light, uncanny eyes.

"I dunno."

"P'raps you'll say you dunno which mush you're a-goin' to lel, neither! Stop that grinnin', Elsie, else I'll del you! What me and Mary says ain't for your yers!"

But Mary had no answer for her. A curious sense of well-being possessed her in spite of the trouble which throbbed in her wild young heart. The wood

smoke, the dear friendly hollies, the familiarity of the tent life, soothed her as if with a kind of enchantment. Perhaps a kind of nostalgia as well as the desperate expedient of seeing Charlotte Cooper had impelled her on the long way to Thorneyhill. Alf had wanted to accompany her, and they had almost quarrelled when she had obstinately refused to let him. The memory of his sulky, heavy-jawed face was like the memory of a bad dream, which had fallen from her as she walked along the twilight road to the old familiar camping places.

"I co't a young cuckoo to-day," said Elsie suddenly.

"What did you do with it?" asked the old woman.

"Killed it," answered the child callously, as the kitten, if it could have spoken, would have told of the butterfly it had mauled to death with its soft paws that morning. "I give it to Tibby, the Lanes' old cat."

The meat was cooked at last and cut up on a plate with a knife. Charlotte had no excess of crockery, or cutlery, so she and Elsie helped themselves with their fingers and put their meat on a piece of bread, while Mary as guest was given a fork. The magpie came in for the bits which were flung him from time to time. Mary had not eaten since midday and was glad of the savoury food.

"Now you praster along, and go off somewhere," said Mrs. Cooper to her grandchild. "Don't you let me dikk you until I hollers you. You can take that bit of meat over to Louie Lane, if you likes."

Elsie needed no second hint. She took the meat, wrapped it over with a corner of her soiled pinafore, and disappeared among the hollies.

"Now you can spik free and fearless," said Mrs. Cooper, approaching her face close to her visitor's. "You needn't tell me what bro't you yer. *I tardered you!* Down there I says, 'Mary James shall come to me,' I says. 'She won't know why she's a-comin',' I says, 'but come she must. Her feet 'll bring her, want she, won't she.' Ah, my dearie, you've a-used that boro rye of yours cruel, you have. I wonders to myself. 'What's the rakli thinkin' of,' I thinks, 'to treat her lovyer the ways she's treated hers! What's the gals comin' to? Divvy, clean divvy, off their yeds!' He come to me, and 'Find her,' he says, 'or I'll thow meself into the pond down there in the brick-valley,' he says. 'Don't do that, my gennleman,' I says. 'The devil takes those what kills theirselves,' I says, 'and you won't be no better off there than here. I'll bring her back to you,' I says. 'It's writ clear in the stars that back to you she'll come, and what the stars says don't never fail.' "

Mary gazed at her, half-hypnotized by her cunning patter.

"What're you a-doin' of, you silly gal," said Mrs. Cooper, bringing her brows together and transfixing Mary's frightened brown eyes with hers, "to send him to his bloody grave and take up with Alf Stace! Alf Stace! a raffaly little gaujo what thinks he's bought the fair because he had some luck fightin' a mush in a picter pallis! You don't kom him, nor never will!"

"I'm a-goin' to marry him," said Mary, in a half-voice.

"Kekker, chai! You'll never rummer that mush, not if he walked to you over gold. I knows what I'm a-sayin' of. Listen! that boro rye of yours wants to see you."

"Where is he?" asked Mary, with dry lips.

"Two miles from yer—up against Wootton Pits. That is, if he ain't drowned hisself yet."

"Did he—did he say he wanted to see me?"

"Haven't I told you? You're a-goin' to see him."

"No, no!"

"Why?"

Mary was silent, with quivering lips. Then she said:

"There's Alf——"

"Alf!" cried the old woman with scorn. "Let him know you've jumped the broomstick with that fine gaujo of yours, and a lot he'd want to marry you. I knows him! He've took up with you this year. Last year he went off with one of them Dyers down in the Bottom, and she've a baby by him now. She've found him a bad bargain. And soon, whether you've a-married him or not, he'll have another lubbeny, and be findin' out about your Adam, and throwin' him up to you. He's got no good Romany blood in him, not a drop, nor any good blood of any sorts whatever."

Mary sat motionless. The news that Alf had had a mistress did not affect her as it would have if she had loved him.

"He's martel sure to yer about you and Adam."

"There's nothin' to yer, if he did," said Mary, waking into indignation. "Adam ain't never had nothin' wrong of me, nor me of him."

"More fool he," said Mrs. Cooper sardonically. "But folks thinks different, and so'll Alf Stace, I give you my honest word. Why did your dad give you to him, and you jump the broomstick with him if you was on'y brother and sister?"

"Who told you?"

"No less than your Adam hisself. I'll not let any one know—what I yers I kips to myself; but they Whichers knows——"

"I'll tell Alf," said Mary, with dull defiance.

"Don't you tell him nothin' till you've a-spoke with your rye up at Wootton."

Mary sat irresolute.

"Tell me, what did you think you was comin' to me for?" asked Mrs. Cooper, with a sudden hawk-like glance at her.

Mary roused herself. "You give Amy Brushfield up at the Post Office somethink to put in Eli Stevens' tea. Amy told Rose Pidgeley, and Rose told aunt. It was somethin' to make him love her true."

"I might or I mightn't," said Mrs. Cooper sharply. "Well?"

Mary unclasped her hand. A half-crown lay in it.

"I want somethink to take true love away," she whispered. "To stop the achin' and the thinkin' and the wantin'. Somethink what'll make you never think no more of the mush."

"There's on'y three things'll stop that," said Mrs. Cooper deliberately. "The first's the best. Go off with the mush on the tober, and live with him—that'll stop the achin', and very like the love too."

"What's the others?"

"To drownd yerself in the pond, or to wait until you're too old and tough to care for any mush what ever wore trousers."

Mary made no answer.

"Well," said Mrs. Cooper, "what am I to say to you lovyer when he pookers mandy?"

"I dunno," said Mary, expressionlessly. "I must sleep on it."

"Thinkin's a hard pillow. Will you come yer to-morrow, if I waits for you?"

"Yes."

"When will you come?"

"About middle day," said Mary slowly.

"If you makes a fool of me——" said the old woman threateningly. "I've treated you tatcho, and you must treat me tatcho."

The magpie outside gave a sudden cry and Mary started in affright.

"That's nothin'; he often makes a godli like that. Listen, I feels a dukkerin' feelin' comin' over me. Give me you vaster, and wait a minute."

Mary gave her hand, and watched with a shudder the filmy look that crept into Charlotte's eyes.

"There's no gettin' away," she said in a sepulchral voice. "I sees you and your boro rye travellin' along the same drum. Happy I sees you, and no adders to trouble you. There's a good time comin', dearie. I sees it."

She clutched Mary's hand tighter, and began to mutter the jargon which the traveller folk called Injun. It was certainly not Romany. Mary sat spellbound with fear and superstition.

"There's sunshine comin' to you," she said. "I feels it on my yed. Sunshine. And plenty of von-gar.¹ You won't never need so long as you live. But there comes a pookerin' kosht in the road, my dearie, a sign-post at cross roads, and there you stands with tears in your yokkers, and a smile on your face."

"Go on," said Mary.

"You goes one road and the boro rye goes the other," said the witch in the same strained voice.

"Are there tears in his eyes, too?" said Mary.

¹ Money.

“I can’t see——”

She sat rigid and still.

“Don’t tell me no more,” said Mary hoarsely.

Mrs. Cooper shook her lean body, and dropped the girl’s hand.

“It’s no good to see too far,” she said. “What do one want more than to know that there’s a few lucky years ahead? None wants to see around more than one carner, thank the dear Duvvlus. I’ve lived long enough to jin that the odds and the evens tarns up reg’lar. If I drops a shillin’ to-day, I pick up one on the saulo¹ as likely as not.”

Her fingers had closed around the half-crown which had been in Mary’s hand. She spat on it, and put it in her ragged skirt.

¹ Morrow.

CHAPTER XXVIII

LYDDON walked with Eleanor by the cart track across the moor to the road and then into the village. At Miss Price's house, where the motor awaited her in the coach-house which Lyddon himself had helped to build, he left her. He did not wish to see Miss Price. They had talked of indifferent matters on the way, almost as if they had been strangers to each other. The fine grey rain fell about them as they bade each other good-bye, and clung like jewelled mist to the bushes. He stopped at the baker's on the way back to buy a loaf, and as he came out the car rushed past him. He had refused Eleanor's offer to give him a lift on the way back. He wanted to get away from her so that he might be able to adjust their new attitude towards each other, so disturbing, so uncomfortable. He left the last cottage behind him at last, and going past White's Bushes, in whose shelter Mrs. Cooper had warned him not to camp, he turned off towards the marl pits. There was only a subdued twitter, here and there, from the birds; it was as if the enveloping cloud had muffled the many voices of the forest, as if he were walking in an underworld, grey-velveted, made of dew, colourless, where nothing was real or tangible, but would vanish like pictures in steam in a moment.

He, too, had the feeling that he was walking in a dream. The wet perfume of the forest rose to him, the bracken and heather brushed against his leggings, and a forest pony and her foal, their thick manes and tails furred with a myriad minute drops, started out of

the deep cart rut, along which they had been walking. To-morrow he would break up his camp and move towards that wild north of the forest that he wanted to explore, and set up his tent in some spot where not even gypsies come; for, as Mary had once said, they have their rounds and haunts just as the stoat or rabbit have theirs. There was no need for him to linger here now, his expectation of seeing Mary had gone. She had slipped out of his grasp with the instinct of escape that any wild thing has. She would never come back.

He reached his tent. He had flung a piece of sack-
ing over the donkey's back, and it was eating the wet
gorse contentedly. Tobacco smoke floated out to him
from the partially uncovered opening, and he strode
forward with surprise.

"It's all right, my lucky gennleman. I was just
keepin' your fire warm for you, and havin' a bit of
baccy."

He beheld Mrs. Cooper beside his fire-tray, her
blackened clay in her mouth, her light blue eyes
blinking confusedly. Her presence filled the tent with
an odour of whisky as well as of shag, and she spoke
with the carefully genteel accent of the half-intoxi-
cated. Her black head was bare, her hair falling down
her neck in dank wisps. She might have been painted
as a disreputable sibyl, for even in drink and age her
head was comely.

"Where's them five suvverins, them beautiful bars
that you promised, my dearie?"

"You had one. The other four were promised if
you found Mary James," said Lyddon, ill-pleased to
find her installed in his tent.

"Well, and han't I found her? Lord love us and
save us, is that all the thanks I gets?"

"Look here, Mrs. Cooper, I want to write a letter or two. We'll settle this question of the money to-morrow."

"You thinks I'm motto. Not a drop of drink but for a little tea have I touched since I last seen you, the Lord would tell you if He could spik down from Heaven."

Her dignity, her wounded defence might have convinced him if he had not smelt the odour of spirits which proceeded from her.

"You treat me tatcho and I'll treat you tatcho," she said huskily, watching his eyes. "It's nothin' more than truth. I found your gal yesterday. She's livin' in Heavenly Bottom, long of her cousin, Gerania Smith's gal, what married a White!"

He put his hand into his breast-pocket, drew out a leather purse, and handed her four sovereigns.

"Five——!" she clamoured, and added coaxingly, "Lord love me, you what puts your hand in your pockets and finds gold there an't goin' to begurtch a poor old traveller what she've arned fair and honest? Every mornin' I've prayed for you, my darling, that you might live rich and happy. You be kushti to mandy, and mandy'll be kushti to you——"

He stopped her flow of speech. "Have you seen Mary?"

"She wasn't two mile from yer last night. She comed to my tan and had a bit to eat along of me and Elsie. 'You go along and see the rye,' I says, but she was atrash to come, frightened to death she were. But she'll come, you'll see, it's you she koms, and no other. All this yer ta'ak about marryin' another mush don't mean nothin'."

"I'm going away to-morrow," he said.

"Now don't you be in such a hurry, my gennleman. You give your little rawnie time."

But he had had enough of Mrs. Cooper. He handed her the other sovereign she coveted, and bade her good-bye. His momentary belief in her, sober, did not extend to what she told him when drunk. He did not believe that Mary had visited her, he was doubtful as to whether she really knew her whereabouts.

Mrs. Cooper, the object of her visit gained, rose to her feet, pulling the man's coat that she wore by way of bodice closer and holding the precious gold tightly in her hand.

"Where is Heavenly Bottom?" he asked as she bade him cordial farewell.

She explained, not too lucidly, and confirmed his belief that she was not speaking the truth. Well, poor old vagabond, she had drawn money from his pocket which would keep her in comfort for some little while, and he did not regret it. She and her kind were doomed to disappear before the clumsy hand of civilisation, and a society which does not tolerate their mode of life. Reprobate as she was, she lived a clean life, she had decencies unknown to slum dwellers; she loved the free air and sun and road with a love inherited from wandering forbears, and she was individual with an individuality impossible to those who live in herds.

His fire had died down, and from a sack in the corner of the tent he fed it with fresh chips, and hung the pot, filled with water, above it. He had thought that Mrs. Cooper had taken her departure, but as he stooped to blow the dying embers into flame, he heard movements at his tent door. The old woman must

have returned again with some fresh design for wheedling something out of him.

"Well, what is it now?" he called out, shortly.

There was no answer, and he unbent his back with impatience, running his hand over his ash-bestrewn hair.

"What the devil is it? Can't you come in?"

And there, at the opening which divided the two parts of the tent, he saw Mary's face. It was not the face he knew, there were subtle differences, the cheeks were pale, dark rings had traced themselves beneath her eyes, there were no gold earrings swinging on either side from the shadow of her hair, the sun-warmed color and vitality seemed to have departed from her.

"Can I come in a minnit?" she asked in the husky voice he knew so well.

"You are ill?" he cried.

She put her ringless hand to her breast, beneath her coat.

"No, I ain't," she said. "Alf got angry with me last night, and hit me yer, and I couldn't sleep——"

"The brute, the damned brute!"

He went to her, and drew her inside, making her sit on his bedding.

"You are wet, dearest."

"That ain't nothin'," she replied with an attempt at her old sweet smile. "If us travellers minded a bit of wet, look——"

"Off with your coat, and you're going to drink a little brandy. I've some in my flask here. It'll make you feel better."

She allowed him to draw her coat off with gentle firmness and submitted to his authority enough to drink a little of the brandy he poured out.

"You dosed me with tatti pani once," he said.
"Don't you remember?"

"I remembers," she answered.

"You are still feeling queer," he said in distress.

"No, I ain't. The brandy done me good. It tarned me all sick and dizzy last night, though."

She opened her faded red blouse simply, and displayed a livid mark on her left breast. "It's nothin' much," she added to allay his horror. And then she added as she closed the blouse: "He didn't mean to hit so hard; his morleys is like iron."

Speech failed him and she leant forward and put her hand on his knee.

"Don't keer like that," she said softly. "Now I wishes I hadn't told you."

She submitted passively when he kissed it, and suffered him to turn back the blouse and press his lips gently to the bruise. When he released her, her eyes were full of tears which did not fall.

"I've made you unhappy; I always make you unhappy," he said.

"No, you don't then, Adam. You're all the 'appiness I got."

"Tell me," he said, abruptly. "Are you going to marry this beast?"

She shook her head.

"He met some one last night as told him 'bout you an' me. Charlotte Cooper said he would. An' he didn't believe as there wan't nothin' in it. He tho't I'd a-bin yer to you last night, an' he was waitin' for me when I got back."

"And he hit you?"

"Yes——"

He could not speak, but held her hand to his lips.

"Why did you run away from me?" he said at last.

"Miss Price come, an' she told me just what I'd a-bin tellin' myself. It ain't for you to marry a traveller, Adam. And she told me about the raunie—that raunie, what come to see you down in the field that day——"

"I told you," he said, quickly, "that she was nothing more than my friend."

"She koms you."

"Love must be on both sides. Do you think I want her and long for her as I do you?"

"If you was to marry her——"

"Hang it, I won't marry her."

All his smothered hostility to Eleanor burst into flame as he found her an obstacle between himself and Mary.

She leant her head against his shoulder, as if to pacify him.

"She's a lady barn——"

"Damn her birth!"

"I must spik——"

"You're not to mention her again."

"She was yer to-day. I seen the car and her in it——"

He laid his hand over her mouth. She kissed it, her great fawn-brown eyes still glistening with tears.

"Mary, are you trying to punish me?"

"Don't be a dinn," she said gently, drawing away his hand.

"Are you going to run away again?"

"Not without tellin' you," she answered shyly.

"But never?"

"Never's a long road," said she.

Her eyes looked out at the vaporous forest without. Mrs. Cooper's dukkerin was in her ears. "There

comes a sign-post at cross-roads. You goes one way, and the boro rye another."

He pulled her across to him.

"You'll belong to me now and always?"

"As long as you wants me," she replied slowly.

"Why shouldn't we get married then?"

"We'se married already traveller way," she whispered. "Let it bide at that, Adam. It's our ways, look, an' I was gived to you——"

The old combat, the old instinct, arose within him! but there was also the ever-present fear of frightening his wild girl away from him again.

"Mary, listen," he said. "Let the gypsy marriage hold for a year—and then, will you marry me in the gaujo way? Somehow, I'd like it. I have nothing to give you that is worth what you are giving me, except my name. And that you won't accept."

"I'll see," said she, doubtfully. "Maybe you'll grow tired of me by then."

"I expect so," said he ironically.

"Our traveller ways ain't your ways——"

"How often you've said that!"

"If it pleases you, I'll promise," she breathed.

"What's the water bilin' for? Your dinner?"

"It's early for that. No, my shirt."

"That's not men's work!" she laughed. "I'll wash it out for you; and look, there's the sun showin' out!"

"You're not fit for washing?" he protested.

"I'm awright," she assured him. "How could I feel bad an' naflo when I was happy like this!"

Her eyes shone at him.

"What you got for dinner, then?" she asked.

"What do you say to sausages?" he suggested, remembering her taste.

"I likes sausages," she said. "I likes the noise they makes in the frazzlengro of a wet day."

He showed her his stores.

"You see I've got enough for two."

"And you left all that yer when you bin up Tharney-hill? It's a wonder it wasn't took. Some of them dirty peerdies'll take anything. And if 'twas mast time, and the pigs was about, they'd smell it out, and make a fine mess."

"I'd no one to leave in charge."

"Allus 'ud have come. She'd do anything for you."

"She offered to come off with me," said Lyddon, and told the story of Allus's visit that morning.

"She's a funny little martel," was Mary's comment. "Look, it is a-clearin'! The birds is beginnin'. There's a bit of blue."

"There's all the summer before us!"

Mary began to take the boiling pot off the hook. He sprang forward and did it for her.

"What you do that for?"

"I don't want you to lift the heavy pot."

"I'm not so bad as that," she said. "Now for your shirt. We'll be able to dry it after all, if this yer rain kips off."

"I want to move to-day."

"What, the keepers bin after you?"

"No. I just want to get off. A large bit of England belongs to us—all the roads and all the way-sides."

"You'll soon find they doesn't when the gav-mushes and them comes after you and moves you on."

"I want to be moved on."

"I don't keer where we goes," said Mary. She stopped her foraging for the soap to kiss the arm that was around her waist and spoke with the hoarseness that he knew meant emotion. "So long as you're with me, Adam."

"What are you hunting for?" he asked, burying his face in the smoky dark hair.

"Soap."

"Bother the shirt. Besides, I've only the soap I wash with and that's a wafer."

"Well, you'd best get some afore we starts, down Tharneyhill," she said practically.

"We won't go through Thorneyhill. We'll go through Burley. You'll want some things, too."

"I don't want much," she said modestly.

"I know one thing you want, and that's your earrings! You don't look yourself without them. I'll buy you some new ones in the first town we have to pass through. There's something else too——"

He took the rings out of his pocket and slipped them on her brown hand.

"There, now you look married."

She laughed, with a touch of constraint.

"Adam! You're beyavin' like as if you was a chavi."

"I'm going to put our goods and chattels together, and pack them in the cart."

He went, whistling, out among the wet gorse-bushes outside, and dragged the tarpaulin off the cart. The donkey looked up, as though it knew a journey was before it. The rain had stopped and the sun, shining through the disappearing vapour, made the hanging drops glitter and shimmer with living light. Away in the enclosure the cuckoo began to call: "Cuckoo!"

Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" Lyddon stopped whistling to imitate it, light-heartedly.

Mary watched and listened, with tender eyes.

Then she folded the soiled shirt. "If we're shiftin', it'll have to do to-morrer," she said to herself.

THE END

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